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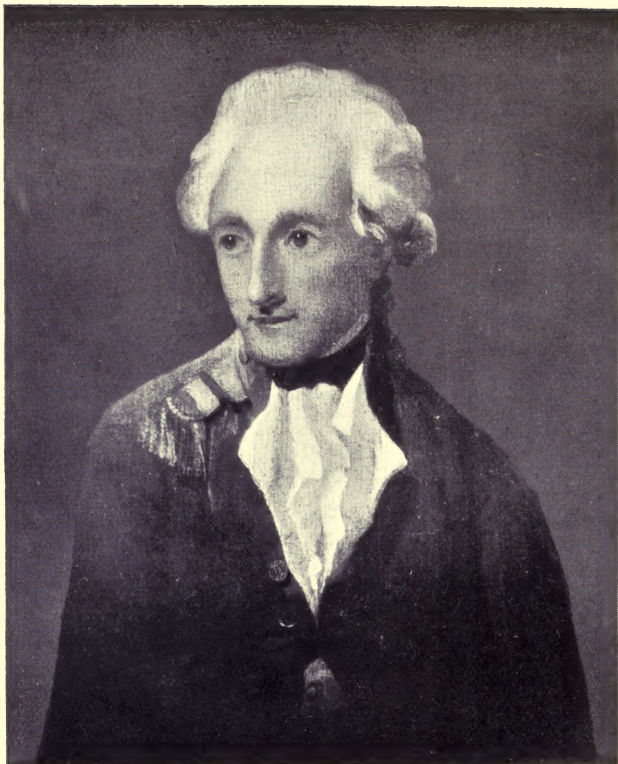






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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE HENRY GRATTAN, M.P.,  
IN THE UNIFORM OF THE IRISH VOLUNTEERS.

FROM THE PORTRAIT PAINTED IN 1782 BY F. WHEATLEY, R.A.,  
NOW IN THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON.

# THE STANHOPE ESSAY 1902

# THE STANHOPE ESSAY 1902

BY

ALFRED E. ZIMMERN

SCHOLAR OF NEW COLLEGE

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Ἔστι γὰρ ψυχὴ πόλεως οὐδὲν ἕτερον ἢ πολιτεία.

ISOCRATES.

‘IRELAND CONSTITUTIONALLY IS INDEPENDENT,  
POLITICALLY SHE CAN NEVER BE ; IT IS A STRUGGLE  
AGAINST NATURE.’

BURKE *in* 1795.





# HENRY GRATTAN

## I.

HENRY GRATTAN was born in Dublin in 1746. He came of a well-known Anglo-Irish family, members of which, during the last half-century, had several times held high office in the State. At the time of his birth his father was one of the foremost men at the Irish Bar, and later on, in 1761, became Recorder of the city. On his mother's side Grattan could point to a similar record. Her family, the Marleys, claimed descent from the de Merlys who 'came over with the Conqueror,' and her father was successively Solicitor-General, Chief Baron of the Exchequer, and Chief Justice of Ireland.

Grattan's boyhood was spent in the purlieus of Dublin. His father's house was in the lawyers' quarter, and he went to school with the sons of his father's colleagues, amongst whom was the future Lord Clare. In 1763 he entered Trinity College, and took his degree four years later. He there made the acquaintance of most of the leading young Irishmen of the day, and obtained

one or two considerable academic distinctions. But his life at this time seems to have been far from happy. He suffered much from bad health, and a severe illness, which he overcame in 1763, left its mark upon his constitution for life. Moreover, his youth was embittered by an unfortunate quarrel with his father. The Recorder, who was a bigoted Whig of the old school, and an irritable and indifferent speaker, was at this time engaged in a contest with the skilful and unscrupulous Dr. Lucas. Lucas was the first popular politician who ran counter to the servile traditions of the Irish Parliament and raised the constitutional question of the relation between the two islands. Young Grattan was one of his most enthusiastic supporters, and his father, who regarded such opinions with all the pious horror of an elderly official for the latest political extravagance, went down to his grave in 1766 without condoning the heresy.

Grattan had always been intended for the family profession. When he left College, towards the end of 1767, he went to London and was entered as a student of the Middle Temple. The rule which compelled all young Irish law-students to qualify themselves in London for the Irish Bar was regarded by many as a grievance. In Grattan's case it was certainly an unmixed advantage. He was not naturally a traveller, and had little interest

and no enthusiasm for what lay beyond his immediate mental horizon. In London he found himself drawn into a circle of interests very remote from the provincial life to which he had been accustomed at home. He learnt to understand what real Englishmen, as ignorant of Ireland as he had been of England, thought about the sister isle. He got an insight into that deep-lying self-confidence, that native suspicion of new and, especially, of foreign ideas, which were then, as now, the distinguishing characteristics of the English mind. He became acquainted with absentee landlords, not as absentees, but in their own English homes, surrounded by an admiring but not subservient tenantry. And of the experience thus gained during his residence in England Grattan certainly made full use. In after years he never regarded England as his home, but neither did he regard it, like too many Irishmen, as a foreign country. Later in life, when his wife's health forced him to spend long months at a time in English watering-places, it was not being in England that he hated, but being away from home. And in his political career he always had his eye upon England. When he was most an Irishman, he was most conscious of what Englishmen would say of him. This was not to be learnt in Dublin, nor in cursory visits to England. Grattan learnt it because circumstances forced him, at a still

impressionable age, to mix with English society and to soak himself in English habits of thought.

From 1767 to 1772, when he was called to the Bar, Grattan spent most of his time in England. He kept his terms at the Temple, but preferred to live in the country, where he studied law in a desultory fashion. He lived for some time at Sunninghill near Windsor, and afterwards in the neighbourhood of Southampton. But he soon found he had no head for the law, and never threw any zest into his work. In 1771 he writes to a college friend who had just bought himself a commission:—‘Your life, like mine, is devoted to professions which we both detest: the vulgar honours of the law are as terrible to me as the restless uniformity of the military is to you . . . Our antipathies to these studies will be a bond of union.’ This does not sound a very cheerful or ambitious note: but troubles had fallen thick upon him in these years. In 1767 he lost his mother, to whom he was very deeply attached, and in the year following, his favourite sister. His relatives, though kind, seem to have been somewhat exacting. ‘Your proposed application to the law,’ writes his uncle, ‘will give great pleasure to your friends; the study, though laborious and disagreeable, is not so painful as idleness,’ and he goes on to remind him, as a good uncle should, of the narrowness of his fortune,

and the value of poverty as a stimulus. Grattan's friends at this time thought him idle, unambitious, and eccentric. The truth was that he had not yet discovered the direction in which his true interests lay: but he had already discovered enough to be sure that he had some. His earlier letters are full of literature. He reads Virgil, Pope, and Bolingbroke, and mourns duly at the death of Gray. He writes poems, but his 'slattern muse' is too coy to be presented to his friends. He enjoys looking over his school classics, and giving each author his appropriate eighteenth-century epithet. In short, his literary taste is no better and no worse than that of the rest of his circle; he liked literature as Fox liked it, though by no means with the same intensity.

For politics too, he had, naturally, a constant interest. They had entered early into his life; Dr. Lucas must have been a household word at the Grattan dinner-table. But in London it was neither books nor statecraft that principally attracted him. His great enthusiasm at this time was for oratory. The years during which he chanced to be in England were a time of supreme importance in the history both of English politics and of English eloquence. He was a frequent and intelligent visitor at debates. He was in time for the Middlesex election, and saw most of the opening acts of the American tragedy. In 1768



Fox had just made his *début*, Junius was the talk of the town, and Burke was speaking to empty houses. But it was Chatham's oratory that most impressed young Grattan. That Achilles of debate emerged from his tent early in 1770, and Grattan was a spectator at that memorable scene in the Lords, when Chatham's opponents endeavoured to clear the House of strangers so as to prevent the magic of his voice from penetrating to the outer world. But Junius knew how to out-Chatham Chatham for the public ear, and the attempt was not renewed. Grattan never missed a speech of Chatham's if he could help it. He heard all his great speeches in 1770, and took down as much of them as he could. They have not been well reported, but collation reveals a good deal of individuality in Grattan's versions. He was evidently far more interested in the form than in the substance. He studied the tricks of style, of gesture, and of pronunciation, and cannot sufficiently admire the superb audacity of some of Chatham's dramatic effects. It was at this time that his landlady at Sunninghill complained of the eccentric habits of her lodger, who would walk up and down the garden half the night, addressing an imaginary gentleman called Mr. Speaker.

It is the more remarkable that Grattan should have detected the greatness of Burke, to whom, as early as 1768, he accords high praise, but 'more



for his matter than for his delivery.' But he was not yet, if ever, able to penetrate to the true springs of Burke's oratory. His mental attitude at this time is presented to us in a review of the political situation which he sent to his friend Broome. It is evidently written under the influence of the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, and from a similar point of view. But it preserves not a trace of that undying power which has made a political masterpiece out of what everybody took for an ephemeral party pamphlet. In his review he forgets Burke's principles in applying them. As a student of Bolingbroke, he is glad to see the 'Patriot King' dethroned: but he has no one to set in his place. We hear much about the expulsion of Mr. Wilkes, and there is more than one side-reference, from the high moral point of view, to Charles Fox and his band of Macaronies. Altogether it is a dull and rhetorical production, which might well have been spared preservation.

Early in January, 1772, he left London for good, to be called to the Irish Bar. It is said that he lost his first case and returned half the fee, fifty guineas, to his client. He himself was still discontented and undecided. 'I am now called to the Bar,' he writes, 'without knowledge or ambition in my profession. The Four Courts are of all places the most disagreeable; the lawyers are in general rather an ardent than an eloquent society. My

purpose is undecided ; my passion is retreat. I am resolved to gratify it at any expense. There is certainly repose, and may be elegance, in insignificance.' In another letter he talks of his 'ardent inefficacy of character.' It is clear from this, and from the sequel, that he was not suffering merely from the ennui which is the speciality of certain classes of the unemployed. Nor was it merely the removal from the absorbing life of London to the comparative obscurity of Dublin. It was rather a habit of self-depreciation which he was unable, through lack of opportunity and encouragement, to overcome. He was very much interested in Irish politics, and moved much amongst the leading Irish public men. Lord Charlemont, an accomplished nobleman and thorough Irishman (as men were Irish in the days before Catholic Emancipation was even dreamed of by the Catholics), was the centre of the political society of Dublin. Through him, and his own brother-in-law, Gervase Bushe, Grattan became acquainted with Flood, Langrishe, Hussey Burgh, and others whose names were later to become famous in the independent Parliament. But there was as yet no real enthusiasm in their ranks. There was criticism in plenty, and Grattan took his full share in lampooning the Lord-Lieutenant and writing political parables against his creatures. But of active campaigning there was at present not a suggestion.

On the petty question of the appointment of some new placemen, Grattan remarks, with more of indifference than of indignation, 'an active perseverance is beyond the spirit of our Parliament or people.' This is in the spring of 1772. The next few years are skipped by his biographer, though we just catch one glimpse of him 'studying very hard,' probably at history and oratory; till in January, 1775, he tells a friend reassuringly, but in the hollow tones of the confirmed valetudinarian, that he thinks he will 'hold some years longer, with an utter distaste for the world.' It is the last note of mawkishness in his correspondence. Within the year Lord Charlemont made him the unexpected offer of a borough in Parliament. He took his seat on December 11, made his first speech, extempore, four days later, and was marked at once, both in the House and in the Press, as a rising man.

## II.

IN 1775, as in 1902, Ireland was not a subject in which Englishmen took much interest. 'Of Ireland I know nothing<sup>1</sup>,' Gibbon tells Lord Sheffield with triumphant modesty, 'and while I am writing the decline of a great Empire, I have not leisure to attend to the affairs of a remote and petty province.' And with the notable exception of Lord Chesterfield, this was the view very generally taken up in polite circles. Small wonder that Arthur Young found difficulty in getting English subscribers for his *Tour* from the society out of which Irish Lord-Lieutenants and officials were recruited. Men did not care to realize that the population of that 'remote and petty province' was nearly half, and its army on the peace establishment nearly equal, to those of its imperially-minded neighbour. But in 1775 Irishmen themselves had not grasped the full significance of these facts. It was the Americans who taught them the lesson.

Ireland had been in disgrace ever since the campaign of 1688. The Revolution, which had brought lasting freedom to England, had merely involved Ireland in the miseries of a fresh military

<sup>1</sup> *Gibbon's Correspondence*, ii. 136.

conquest. The Penal Laws against the Catholics were not indeed passed till the reign of Anne: but the claims of the Irish Parliament did not even receive a hearing after the events of the glorious Revolution. Modern Irish constitutional history begins with William Molyneux. Molyneux, who was member for Dublin University in the Irish House of Commons, wrote a pamphlet in 1698 with the object of proving by legal and historical evidence that Ireland was totally independent of the English Parliament. He maintained that Ireland had always been considered in early times as a kingdom independent of England, but governed by the same monarch; and brought forward as his crowning argument the fact that John was crowned King of Ireland during the lifetime of his father. The whole case is worked out with great knowledge, skill, and moderation, and Molyneux's book is the repository from which Grattan and the other champions of an independent Parliament drew all their historical arguments. England, of course, refused to admit, or even to hear, the claim, and the question was finally put at rest, for Englishmen, in 1719, when the English Parliament passed a measure (6 Geo. I) declaring, in virtue of a right which Irishmen never acknowledged, that it had the power of binding Ireland by its acts. Moreover, by Poynings' Law, the acts of the Irish House were already liable to suppression or altera-



tion by the English Privy Council. The procedure to be gone through, therefore, before the passing of an Irish bill into law was as follows:—Heads of bills arising in either House passed to the Irish Privy Council, where they could be altered or suppressed; then on to a committee of the English Privy Council, where they went through the same ordeal; then back to the Irish House in which they took their rise, where they could be accepted or rejected, but not altered; then to the other House; after which they received the royal assent. Parliament only sat every other year. An Octennial Act was passed, at the fourth attempt, by the agitation of Dr. Lucas in 1768, after the last Parliament had sat during the whole of the reign of George II. A large part of the revenue of the country was outside the control of Parliament, having been voted away in perpetuity as ‘hereditary revenue.’ The Irish House of Lords had been deprived (in defiance of Molyneux) of its supreme appellate jurisdiction. Irish judges still held their seats at the royal pleasure; there was no Habeas Corpus Act, no national militia, no Irish Mutiny Act, and no Placemen’s Act. None but Protestants had a seat or a vote. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the House was representative even of Protestant opinion. From a memorial carefully drawn up in 1783 it appears that, out of 300 members, 81 were returned by

the people, and the remaining 219 by patrons. With its financial powers curtailed, its membership flagrantly non-representative, its leading men always accessible to the temptations of office, its very existence rendered unnecessary by the more powerful and far less corrupt assembly at Westminster, the Irish Parliament might well have been given up in despair. And so apparently it had been, until the end of the reign of George II. At any time between 1688 and 1750 the project of a legislative Union would have been received with acclamation by such feeble public opinion as could at that time find expression in Ireland. And even in 1775 Parliament had not yet a strong hold upon the aspirations of the people. But it was not merely the accidental coincidence of the American Revolution which roused the dormant national spirit of Ireland; nor was it the sudden appearance of a body of young, ardent, and eloquent politicians. America was the occasion, and Grattan was the effect, of the operation of more deep-lying causes.

The first seven years of Grattan's parliamentary life are by far the most important in his career. By the settlement of 1782 his reputation as a statesman stands or falls. His rise was extraordinarily rapid, and his crowning opportunity came unusually early. To understand how he secured it, and



what use he made of it, it is necessary to study these seven years at some length. They are, indeed, years characteristic of Irish history, with their record of brilliant eloquence, untiring service, and generous enthusiasm, worse than wasted through want of knowledge and patience, and by that malicious demon of ill-luck who leaves his dog's-ear on all the finest pages of the Irish annals.

Grattan entered Parliament at an interesting crisis. Flood, by far the ablest man on the Opposition side, had just stultified himself by accepting a post in the administration. Whatever his motives—and there is no sufficient reason for thinking them dishonourable—this step was fatal to his career. It was practically a counsel of despair, a confession that the few crumbs of reform to be coaxed out of a corrupt and nonchalant administration were preferable to a starvation diet in Opposition. He could not have chosen a more unfortunate moment in which to leave vacant the leadership of the party of reform. The American War, now approaching its climax, had raised the whole question of the relations between the mother-country and her dependencies. In England, the party of prerogative held an almost unquestioned ascendancy. It was the Rockingham Ministry, with which Burke was in sympathy, and not the reactionaries, who passed the declaratory act as-

serting the right of the mother-country to tax the colonies. The American colonists, like the English working-classes, were, as the phrase went, 'virtually represented.' The right to legislate carried with it the right to tax. If this was so, then the old doctrine of no taxation without representation was gone past recall. Irish public men could not fail to see the implications of the American issue. If Franklin, who visited Dublin in 1771, based his arguments upon Molyneux, Grattan was to base his upon the Declaration of Independence and the thinker whose spirit it breathes, Molyneux's friend, John Locke. In 1775 the Americans had gone so far as to issue a manifesto to the Irish in which the identity of their interests was specially set forth. It evoked considerable support amongst the Presbyterians of the North, but in Dublin the parliamentary Opposition gave it only a cold welcome. Lord Harcourt, who had followed Townsend, the unpopular hero of Grattan's lampoons, as Lord-Lieutenant, had succeeded in detaching Flood and conciliating the leading members of the Opposition. Moreover, in time of war the Irish gentry were Englishmen enough to postpone the study of principles and think only of the common safety.

At the beginning of the session Harcourt had been successful in making Ireland take a definite part in the American struggle. Of the 12,000

troops commanded by statute to remain in Ireland for the defence of the country, 4,000 were allowed by Parliament to be withdrawn in order to proceed to America in the character (as Flood put it) of 'armed negociators.' This was in October, 1775. Grattan took his seat in December, and at once proceeded on a very different course. His early speeches have unfortunately not been preserved, but he devoted himself especially to the question of financial retrenchment. There was indeed material enough in the pension lists of Lord Harcourt to give a budding orator every chance of practising his declamation. At the same time he did not conceal what must then have been regarded by most of his colleagues as unpatriotic views. He sided wholeheartedly with Burke, Fox, and the small band of English Whigs who had unswervingly upheld the American cause from the beginning and would have regarded the success of the British arms as the surest precursor of the ruin of British freedom. He soon began to attract attention, not only in Dublin by his speeches, but in England by his opinions. Burke, writing to give Fox a send-off for a short holiday in Ireland, in 1777, draws his attention to a certain 'young man who stands very forward in Parliament and in profession, and, by what I hear, with more goodwill and less envy than usually attends so rapid a progress.'

A young speaker, growing in popularity despite the profession of reasoned and unpopular opinions, was too rare a phenomenon to be missed in those days of 'heavy and lumpish acquiescence' in reactionary doctrines. Fox sought out Grattan in Dublin, and laid the foundations of a friendship which was cemented by common action in 1782, and lasted till his death in 1806.

In 1777 Lord Harcourt was succeeded at the Castle by the Earl of Buckinghamshire, who was even more incompetent, and therefore more lavish in honours and pensions, than the usual occupants of the post. The Government, said Burke, will not be hard put to prove the loyalty of Ireland in the American struggle. 'Have they not already borne the Earl of Buckinghamshire?' A few months after the Lord-Lieutenant came the news of the defeat of Burgoyne at Saratoga (Oct. 1777). This exercised a profound effect on the Irish Parliament, followed as it was by the fruitless offer to the Americans of all that they had originally demanded. It proved Grattan to have been in the right, and rallied round him the main body of those who had hitherto stood aloof. Moreover, the wholesale concessions to the American 'rebels' could not fail to raise the hopes of the loyal Irish for the redress of some of their own grievances. It was the first of a long series of object-lessons from which the people of Ireland have not failed

to draw the proper moral. 'England's difficulty is Ireland's opportunity' was not a doctrine first propounded by Irishmen. It has been adopted at one time or another by every Irish leader from Grattan to Mr. Redmond: and it has more often than not ended in success. But it was originated by Lord North. The session after Saratoga produced almost automatically a small measure of Catholic relief and a paltry instalment of Free Trade.

But these were not really the burning questions of the year. War had broken out with France, and it was discovered that the resources of Ireland against invasion were ludicrously inadequate. When the French appeared off the north coast sixty troopers only could be spared for its defence. The nation was forced to take matters into its own hands. It was not the first time that a people outdid a government at its own trade. Associations of Volunteers sprang up all over the country, and the numbers speedily swelled to upwards of 40,000. The Catholics, for once, were allowed a share in the common enthusiasm; they did not as yet bear arms, but they were permitted to subscribe liberally towards the expenses! Party differences were instantly forgotten, and the whole of Ireland was united in loyalty against the hereditary Catholic enemy of England. At first there was real alarm. With the re-establishment of confi-



dence came an awakening of public spirit. In 1777 Burke writes that, with the exception of the populace in Dublin and in parts of the North, public opinion means nothing but the opinion of a few leading men. With the appearance of the Volunteers that state of affairs passed away, never to return. No doubt the new nation was very ignorant, hot-headed, and easily misguided. But it could no longer continue to be ignored. Public opinion, as Grattan afterwards learnt to his cost, knew how to make itself felt. Even Parliament, in all its armour of corruption, felt bound to yield at its touch.

No wonder the Lord-Lieutenant took alarm at the consequences of his own negligence. It was difficult to know what to do under the circumstances. An Ireland in arms, with so long a tale of grievances, and the example of America before her, was dangerous enough. But to attempt, even if by law he had the power, to disarm men who (as the Galway corps proclaimed) were ready 'to swim in their own blood in defence of His Majesty and their native country,' would simply have been to court the danger which he was trying to avoid. There was nothing for it but to compromise; to give discouragement, but, if possible, without giving offence. He praised them as citizens, and ignored them as soldiers. A little flattery, a few commercial concessions, and a British victory at sea, would

soon, he thought, bring back the State into the old rut. It was impossible that he should realize the true nature of the feeling which was spreading over the whole of the country. The Irish were not yet conscious of it themselves.

The agitation took the form of a demand for a free export trade. Ireland's commercial distresses had for some time past been coming to a head. The chief Irish exports at this time were linen and food-stuffs; for woollens were not allowed to be exported at all. The war with America had closed one profitable market for linens, and in 1776 the British Parliament (ostensibly to prevent fresh supplies from reaching France or America) suddenly proclaimed an embargo on the export of food-stuffs. This iniquitous measure, which is declared by Arthur Young to have been a concession to three or four wealthy contractors, spelled ruin to the Irish landed interest. In the meantime expenses were increasing, there was no money in the Treasury, loans had been tried once too often, and the State was practically bankrupt. This was too much even for the patient Irish manufacturer to endure in silence. A violent agitation broke out in the Dublin Press. A spirit of retaliation was abroad. The English embargo could be met by an Irish boycott. Wits recalled the advice of Swift, 'Burn everything English except their coals.' Even the somnolent Irish Privy Council



took alarm at the prospect of a clamouring herd of placemen and soldiers.

Here again Government was in a dilemma of its own creating. [Free Trade,] in whole or in large measure, was the only thing which could rescue Irish commerce. But at the abolition of the smallest restriction in the commercial code, English manufacturers were up in arms. Lord North, as usual, tried to steer between Scylla and Charybdis, and succeeded in passing a small measure of relief through the English House. Buckingham drew up a careful speech for the opening of Parliament, the leaders of the Opposition promised their support in the interests of order, and the agitation, like many another before it, seemed to have run its course.

It was at this moment that Grattan saw his first great opportunity. He refused to be disarmed by the conciliatory wording of the address, and announced his intention of moving an amendment in favour of complete Free Trade. His colleagues, some of whom were in office, at first refused to follow him; Grattan persisted, and after a long debate the amendment was ingeniously altered by Flood so as to advocate Free Trade without assailing the administration. The Government was taken by surprise, and allowed the address, thus amended, to be carried unanimously. This was Grattan's first great parliamentary triumph; for the tone of

his speech was little in accordance with the moderate wording of his amendment. The effect of these tactics outside the House was just as he desired. The address was brought up to the Lord-Lieutenant at the Castle by the entire House, and the streets along the route were lined with Volunteers. Grattan's name sprang at once to the front. Public opinion was now at length awakened, and men began for the first time to look to Parliament as the embodiment of the national will. Grattan was determined to strike while the iron was hot. The address was carried on Oct. 12, 1779. The King's reply ignored the amendment. On Nov. 4 a great Free Trade demonstration was held on College Green. Doubts were already beginning to be thrown on the legality of the English acts respecting Irish trade. On the 20th, Alderman Horan, a prominent Dublin merchant, presented some woollens for export, in order to test the law. On the 24th, a chance remark in the House set ablaze the whole smouldering controversy about the position of the Irish Parliament. The English Houses had imposed a small tea duty upon Ireland. The Attorney-General was asked why the Government sanctioned the duty before it had been passed in the Irish House. He replied that the passing of an Irish Act was a mere matter of expediency, and not of any real consequence. After this ridiculous reply it was impossible that matters

should remain as they were. On the same day a motion against new taxation was passed by a large majority, and on the 25th, in supply, the appropriated duties were granted, not for the ordinary term of two years, but only for six months. On Dec. 13, the resolutions in favour of a free woollen trade and liberty to trade with America and Africa were unanimously adopted. Meanwhile, the English Whigs were not idle. Fox and Shelburne gave the worn-out Ministry no peace, and the news from America was less and less reassuring. Early in the next year, Lord North decided to bow before the storm. In February, 1780, an Act establishing perfect free trade between England and Ireland was passed through the English Parliament and received the Royal assent.

Thus ended the first round of the struggle. Within four months, by adroitness in Parliament and agitation outside, Grattan had secured the leadership for himself, and for his country the conditions of a restored prosperity. The mortified Government prepared to make the most of their tardy generosity. Buckingham had Dublin illuminated when the Act passed into law, and then prepared again to fold his hands in sleep. But

the Irish Parliament did not intend to rest on its laurels. The events of the last few months had brought its deliberations into a prominence to which they had never been used. 'You are grown to that degree of importance,' writes Burke on New Year's Day to an Irish member, 'that the discourses in your Parliament will have a much greater effect on our immediate future than our conversation can have on yours.' Grattan thought that the moment had come for bringing forward the subject which he had hitherto been deliberately keeping in the background. He gave notice that he would raise the question of the independence of the Irish Parliament. Again his colleagues distrusted the wisdom of his tactics. They saw no use in raising a barren constitutional question when so much yet remained to be done to repair the resources of the country. The House of Lords passed a resolution against those who 'directed the people's attention from commercial advantages.' The English Whigs were alarmed at the rate at which Irish affairs were travelling. Burke, who liked all things done decently and in order, was especially disturbed at Grattan's projects. 'Will no one speak to this madman,' he wrote; 'will no one stop this madman, Grattan?' But expostulation was wasted labour; Grattan had made up his mind once and for all. On April 19, 1780, in a speech nearly two hours long, which he always

regarded as the best that he ever made, he moved 'that his most excellent Majesty, by and with the consent of the Lords and Commons of Ireland, are the only power competent to enact laws to bind Ireland.' After fifteen hours' debate, the motion was rejected by thirty-nine votes in a House of 233. But even these numbers, remarkable enough at the first discussion of such a question, do not give a just idea of the effect of the speech in the House. A large number of those who voted against Grattan did so, not because they objected to his principles, but because they thought them premature. Indeed, the only voice raised in favour of the legislative power of Great Britain was that of the Attorney-General, and *he* preferred to rely upon the argument, always weighty in an assembly composed like the Irish Commons, that as the titles of half the landed property in Ireland depended upon British laws, the resolution was a covert attack upon the security of the country proprietors.

Buckingham writes home on the 21st 'with the utmost concern' to record 'the almost unanimous sense of the House against the validity of English Acts.' This is indeed high tribute to the debating power of the speech. And yet, as we read it now, it is not so much the discourse of a statesman as the harangue of a tribune. It is addressed rather to the nation than to its representatives.



There is more in it of declamation than of reasoning: more of true oratorical fire than of the fine-spun arguments which Grattan usually affected. It is indeed, as the orator meant it to be, the call to arms of an awakening nation. He exalts and encourages his countrymen, and congratulates them on the wonderful 'visitation' of enthusiasm which has in a few months formed a powerful national will out of a chaos of individual opinions. But he does not pay court to Ireland at the expense of England. Her claim is to an equal heritage of empire. 'Anything less than liberty is inadequate to Ireland. We are too near the British nation, too conversant with her history, too much > fired by her example, to be anything less than her equal: anything less, and we should be her bitterest enemies.' And again, in the course of an argumentation as ingenious as it is deeply sincere, he endeavours to reconcile imperial loyalty with Irish aspiration, and, what was more difficult, with the recent course of Irish history. England, he says, has done her part: she has sacrificed her monopoly: it remains for Ireland to do hers: to assert her independence. 'If England is a tyrant, it is you that have made her so. . . . It is not in the disposition of England. It is not in the interest of England. It is not in her arms.' Then, after dwelling on the concessions in vain offered to the Americans, he asks triumphantly, 'What! has



England offered this to the resistance of America, and will she refuse it to the loyalty of Ireland?' A hard nut, which Buckingham, unable to crack, sends on for the consumption of Lord North. And he ends with a passage so typical of his epigrammatic and imaginative style, and yet so instinct with the feelings and ideals by which he was at that time actuated, that it is worth quoting entire. 'I will not be answered by a public lie in the shape of an amendment; neither, speaking for the subjects' freedom, am I to hear of faction. I wish for nothing but to breathe, in this our island, in common with my fellow subjects, the air of liberty. I have no ambition, unless it be the ambition to break your chain and contemplate your glory. I never will be satisfied so long as the meanest cottager in Ireland has a link of the British chain clanking to his rags. He may be naked, he shall not be in irons. And I do see the time is at hand, the spirit is gone forth, the declaration is planted; and though great men should apostatize, yet the cause will live; and though the public speaker should die, yet the immortal fire shall outlast the organ which conveyed it, and the breath of liberty, like the word of the holy man, will not die with the prophet, but survive him.'

After this battle-cry there could be no thought of turning back. Grattan was trusting in the

effect of his eloquence, and in the powerful influence which he could exercise through the Volunteers. He and his party in Parliament, and outside it, the unanimous opinion of Ireland, as expressed in her army of citizen soldiers, were to conduct this new national campaign. It is typical of the nobility of his character that he did not emphasize this practical argument more strongly in his speech. To ignore it would have been impossible. But he preferred to persuade rather than to intimidate; and to win his plea through Ireland's loyalty rather than England's difficulty. The English Whigs were not in his confidence, and probably not even in his calculations. The weakness of Lord North, and the headlong course of Irish politics had caused them latterly to stand aloof. Pleased as he was at the grant of Free Trade, Burke was mortified to see the undignified figure cut by the British Parliament. The alliance between the English Whigs and the Irish Opposition was tacitly being abandoned when a ludicrous act of ministerial tyranny roused all constitutionalists to the defence of their common liberties.

The effect of Grattan's eloquence soon began to be seen in unexpected directions. As early as February a Sligo magistrate had refused to commit a deserter charged under the English Mutiny Act. But now the question of the execution of English Acts became one of urgent importance. With the

spread of Grattan's sentiments it was found that few magistrates or juries would take any notice of the English Mutiny Act at all. It was not a question, as the Lord-Lieutenant naïvely put it, of the legal validity of the law, but 'of the improbability of its being executed,' and he strongly urged the re-enactment in the House of all English measures, but especially of the Mutiny Act. At the same time Buckingham has to notify insubordination in his tame flock of Parliamentary creatures. On April 28, 'many members under obligations to Government unexpectedly deserted, and several independent gentlemen acted contrary to assurances which might have been deemed binding.' The Home Government was much vexed at the reappearance of the Irish spectre in so pronounced a form. Buckingham was ordered to oppose an Irish Mutiny Bill with all the means at his command (which, if promises be included, were considerable). But scheme as he might, Buckingham was unable to prevent the passage of the Bill. It went through both Houses and was sent to the Privy Council. The Ministry scented an opportunity for mischief, and, with infatuated perverseness, added a clause rendering the Bill perpetual. Meanwhile Buckingham, that master of phrases, 'had been employing his time for the best advantage of His Majesty's service.' In spite of the violent and impassioned protests of the united Opposition, the

Bill was passed by 114 votes to 62; and the discreditable manœuvre was thus crowned with temporary success. Sooner than concede the principle (universally accepted by both sides in the Irish Parliament) of the non-validity of English Acts, the Ministry preferred, in defiance of all constitutional usage, to establish a perpetual military power in the dominions of the Crown. Had the *English* Parliament passed a perpetual Act, it would have been of no consequence, for Parliament could still annually withhold military supplies. But the ingenuity of this Irish scheme lay in the fact that the Irish army was paid out of the hereditary revenue, which had been granted in perpetuity, and that therefore the people of Ireland had now no constitutional<sup>1</sup> safeguard against a military despotism. Thus the session which had begun so brilliantly, ended on September 2, 1780, in the temporary eclipse of the popular party.

Before the next round of the struggle opened, one of the protagonists was to be removed. Buckingham retired to England 'ulcerated with a variety of embarrassments,' leaving Government a rich legacy of promises behind him. He was succeeded by Lord Carlisle, who arrived, with William Eden as Chief Secretary, before the beginning of the

<sup>1</sup> Constitutional, not practical: for the Irish Parliament could still control the *collection* of the revenue. See *Grattan's Speeches*, i. 244-5.

New Year. The two had already been associated as commissioners in that fruitless American embassy from which Grattan's logic drew such merciless arguments. Carlisle, who is better known to us as the guardian of Byron, was an old friend and schoolfellow of Charles Fox. He came over determined, if not to concede Irish demands, at least to treat Irishmen as gentlemen. But it was too late to kill the national agitation with kindness.

During the next twelve months the movement grew apace. Influential meetings were held in Dublin protesting against the gift of a nominal free trade which could at any moment be withdrawn by the hand that presented it. The non-importation agreement was revived. The coast was still menaced by the fleets of France and Spain, and the Volunteers, conscious of their decisive influence on the situation, daily increased in numbers. By the summer of 1781 there were upwards of 80,000 men in arms, and Grattan, who knew how to employ a parliamentary recess, went round with the other leaders, reviewing the provincial battalions. Before Parliament met, Flood, who had long been uncomfortable in the Vice-Treasurership, resigned his office, and returned to the Opposition. The long-expected session opened on October 9, 1781, and the galleries of the House were crowded night after night. Carlisle



would have liked publicly to thank the Volunteers in the speech from the throne, but strict orders from home forbade him. The Opposition was just preparing to harass the Government on the subject of Poynings' Law, when the appalling news of the surrender of Yorktown, which arrived at the beginning of December, rudely interrupted all petty deliberations. In sharp contrast to what took place in England, a loyal address was immediately proposed, and when Grattan inopportunately wished to tack on to it a statement of the Irish demands, the House very properly refused to listen to him. But early in the New Year the agitation was renewed. On Feb. 15, the representatives of 143 Volunteer Corps met at Dungannon in Ulster, and passed three important resolutions. The first two, drawn up by Charlemont, Flood, and Grattan in concert, asserted the independence of the Irish Parliament. The third, which Grattan drew up on his own initiative, asserted the principle of religious toleration, and commended a bill, then before Parliament, for a relaxation of some of the more stringent provisions of the Penal Code. Again Grattan outran his colleagues in his anxiety to raise dangerous topics. It was the first attempt to enlist the Roman Catholics in the national cause. But Grattan desired to have a united Ireland behind him, and he easily succeeded in carrying his resolution through the convention.

end of America  
at Yorktown -  
Poyning's Law



A week later, he again moved a declaration of Irish rights in the House, but was defeated by 137-68. This speech, very unlike his previous utterance on the subject, consists chiefly of a careful review of the authorities on the question of right. He had clearly no hopes of carrying the House against Carlisle. He knew that after Yorktown the North Ministry was doomed, and that it was time to mature his plans in view of a Whig government. In any case his speech seems certainly to have missed its effect. Public opinion, at least in Dublin, was now veering round to the policy of 'allowing the question of right to sleep, providing the exercise of the power claimed under it should never again be resorted to<sup>1</sup>.'

But all the tact and conciliation of Carlisle were stultified by the carelessness of the English Government. Grattan succeeded in unearthing no less than five English Acts passed in the last session, which bound Ireland by name. One of these was actually published by Eden in the *Dublin Gazette*. The Grand Juries and the Volunteers were roused in a moment, and resolutions urging the immediate adoption of the national demand poured in from all sides. It soon became evident that without the grant of legislative independence, Ireland simply could not be governed at all. Sensible men began seriously to contemplate separa-

<sup>1</sup> Letter of C. F. Sheridan, *Grattan's Life*, ii. 215.

tion. 'You might as well strive to make the Thames flow up Highgate Hill' Eden told the English Commons, 'as attempt to legislate for Ireland,' and his hearers, deep entangled in the American imbroglio, well knew what that spirit portended. After this, the last but not the least of its many blunders, the North Ministry did not long survive. On March 20, Lord North announced that the most disastrous Ministry England had ever seen had ceased to exist. Lord Rockingham succeeded him in the Premiership, with Shelburne and Fox as Secretaries of State. They found Ireland the first and most urgent question in their hands. Carlisle was immediately and somewhat discourteously recalled, and Lord Portland appointed in his place. The Easter recess of the Irish Parliament lasted from March 14 to April 16, and Rockingham and Fox hoped to get a breathing-space in which to think over the situation.

✓ This month is the crucial period of Grattan's career. He had an extremely difficult hand to play; it was full of good cards, but the loss of a single trick might ruin his chances. The cards themselves are familiar enough to all who have looked on at the high political game as played in Ireland. An English Ministry, new and vigorous, and anxious to concede all reasonable demands: an Irish agitation, sincere and vehement, but in danger of being provoked into violence, or deluded

by false promises: a national party, combined of a mass of heterogeneous elements, bigoted Protestants and Catholic apologists, noblemen, landowners, lawyers, and merchants, ex-officials and ultra-Irishmen, welded together, but only for a moment, by a common enthusiasm against self-confessed injustice. The element of personal rivalry, never long absent in Irish politics, might at any moment reappear to break up the unity of the party. Grattan was, for the time, the undisputed leader of the Irish patriots, and had the advantage of being on friendly terms with the leading men in the new Ministry, who were even relying upon him to become one of themselves. Although he refused to take office, he remained throughout in their confidence. His knowledge of English conditions, his conciliatory manner, and the remarkable power that he appeared to exercise over Irish opinion, had given him a considerable reputation among English politicians. He is always spoken of as a 'safe' man—open to argument, and worth securing as an ally. He determined to play a bold game, to allow the new Ministry no delay, and to force them to settle the Irish question once and for all, on his own lines.

Before Parliament adjourned, the Speaker had been ordered by a vote of the House to send a circular to the members ordering them to attend on April 16, 'as they tender the rights of the Irish

Parliament.' It rested with Grattan to make what he liked of the proceedings of that day. Every pressure was brought upon him to put off the meeting of Parliament, if only for a week or two. Portland could only be in Ireland at the earliest on April 14, and was very unwilling to be hurried. Neither Rockingham nor Fox, as is clear from their letters, expected an adjournment to be refused. Moreover, Grattan himself had again been ill, and had only just undergone a severe operation. But he was not to be deterred. He resolved that Parliament should not only meet, but that it should put the Ministry into a position from which it should be unable to recede. It was an old manœuvre—to win the battle by pretending that it was already won. This time, at least, it was abundantly successful. When Grattan moved his address on April 16, before a vast and expectant audience, largely composed of Volunteers, he spoke as if every word in that lengthy composition had already received the Royal approval.

His first words struck the note of triumph. 'I am now to address a free people. Ages have passed away, and this is the first moment in which you could be distinguished by that appellation.' And not only did he assume independence, but he already threw away the weapons by which it had been gained. He said farewell to the Volunteers. 'These associations, like other institutions, will

perish, they will perish with the occasion that gave them being, and the gratitude of the country will write their epitaph.'

Two days later, in a long letter to Fox, Grattan elaborates his scheme. In brief, it involved the abolition of four institutions, a foreign legislature, a foreign judicature, a legislative privy council, and a perpetual army. This was, of course, a far greater reform than the Ministry had contemplated: but Grattan would take all or nothing. Thus he writes to a friend who was going to interview Shelburne:—'take notice that we not only conceive ourselves committed, but conceive the question now carried, and drink the 16th of April, 1782, as the day of our redemption. We wait only to thank England, not to negotiate with her.' Parliament adjourned till May 26, to wait for the King's reply to the address. Again, Grattan would brook no delay. He lets Shelburne know that 'if nothing is concluded by the 26th *we must proceed as if refused*.'

These were menacing words to use when the popular party could muster over 80,000 men with 200 cannon, against some 5,000 regular troops. And it was in this sense, probably, that the Ministry understood the threat. There was no alternative but to capitulate with a good grace. Portland's speech from the throne on May 27, surrendered the whole position, and promised to



'gratify every wish expressed in the late addresses to the throne.' Never was there a parliamentary struggle so quickly and so signally decided, nor one that ended amidst such mutual concord and satisfaction. 'Gratified in these particulars,' so ran the Irish answer to the King's speech, 'we do assure His Majesty that no constitutional question between the two countries will any longer exist which can interrupt their harmony ; and that Great Britain as she has approved of our firmness, so she may rely on our affection.' Seldom has a prophecy so confidently made been so pathetically mistaken.

Grattan's object was achieved. He had kept his party together at the difficult moment, and had obtained the full measure of his demands. He regarded the crisis as over. There would be difficulties, no doubt, in getting the new constitution into working order, and there would be many matters of detail to arrange. But the main lines of the settlement were clear and distinct, and the promise in the address was final.

It is clear that the Ministry thought rather differently. On May 17, Shelburne and Fox introduced two resolutions into the English Lords and Commons. The first declared for the repeal of the Act of 1719, the modification of Poynings' Law, and the abandonment of the appellate jurisdiction of the English House of Lords. This was



all in strict fulfilment of the promise of the address. But the second resolution went further and spoke of 'measures for the establishment of the connexion between the two countries on a solid and permanent footing.' These measures could not now, of course, be taken in England alone; they must either be carried concurrently through both Parliaments, or settled in the form of a treaty by commissioners appointed by both nations. From Fox's speech it is clear that he contemplated the latter alternative. Now Grattan had continually spoken of the concession of the Irish demands as a treaty<sup>1</sup>. Formally speaking, he had, of course, no warrant for using the word. But he considered the whole transaction as a solemn reconciliation between the two nations, recorded in the journals of their respective Parliaments. He was particularly averse to any idea of a *bargain* between the two countries. He regarded the English concessions as a settlement of justice and not of expediency. 'All we ask of England,' he writes, 'is that she will withdraw a barren claim, that we may shake hands with her.' Ireland cannot negotiate for 'she has nothing to yield. She can give

<sup>1</sup> Pitt speaks similarly of the Act of Union as a 'treaty between independent nations' (speech of April 21, 1800), and Irish members, from Grattan downwards, have regarded the word as a pledge of the maintenance of the representation at 103. That interpretation has now, however, been abandoned by all parties in England.

nothing but affection.' Above all, 'my great object is to put an end to that painful state of mind, that alienated sentiment which negotiation founded on our ultimatum would inspire. I am desirous,' he says, and his whole life proves the truth of his words, 'not to accustom the Irish mind to an alien and suspicious habit of thought with regard to Great Britain.' In other words, what Englishmen regarded as business, Irishmen regarded as haggling about trifles. The problem to be decided was whether it was better to leave the outstanding questions, which involved nothing less than the international position of Ireland, to settle themselves as circumstances arose, or to run the risk of a fresh alienation of Irish sentiment by reopening the discussion. Fox<sup>1</sup> wisely determined not to abandon the treaty scheme, but to let it wait for a more favourable opportunity. Unfortunately the Providence that waits upon Irish affairs did not allow that opportunity to come.

The course of events quickly diverted the thoughts of the Ministry from Ireland. On July 1 Rockingham died, and on the 2nd the King sent for Shelburne. Then ensued an embarrassing

<sup>1</sup> There can be no doubt that Fox was gravely dissatisfied with Grattan's scheme, though he does not appear to have known who was to blame for the pressure put on his Ministry; see an important letter of his in *Grattan's Life*, iii. 106-112.

state of affairs. Everyone distrusted Shelburne, but only Fox dared to tell him so. The result might have been foreseen. Fox was intrigued out of the cabinet, and Shelburne, his inferior in everything but economics, was left supreme, with France, Ireland, and America on his hands.

Meanwhile trouble was again brewing in Ireland. For a few weeks after the memorable Royal message all went merry as a marriage-bell. A grant of £50,000, which was all that he could be induced to take, was unanimously made to the hero of the hour, for the purchase of lands and a house. A day of public thanksgiving was proclaimed. Above all, on the motion of Grattan, a sum of £100,000 was voted from the Irish Treasury to raise 20,000 seamen for the imperial navy. But the smouldering animosities which Grattan had before been fearing were now to burst suddenly into flame. All this time Flood had sat moodily by, smarting under the successes of the man who had usurped his own old position. At last he thought he saw an opportunity for regaining his lost ascendancy. On June 13, he called the attention of the House of Commons to the fact that the new settlement was not sufficiently safeguarded. The bill passed through the English House merely repealed the law of 1719, but did nothing to impugn the principle on which that law had been founded. What was wanted to make the new liberties perfectly

secure was not a simple repeal of the law, but a total renunciation of the claim asserted in it. It was around this wretched metaphysical distinction, as Burke would have called it, that all the legal dust of the so-called 'simple repeal' controversy was set flying. Flood, never happier than when he had a subtle argument to embroider, tried to frighten Irishmen into the idea that England had deliberately reserved herself this loophole for evasion. An eccentric English peer, Lord Abingdon, lent colour to this notion by bringing forward an anti-Irish bill in the English House of Lords; and, if anything more were wanted to raise an agitation, it was supplied in the nick of time by Lord Mansfield, who by adjudicating an outstanding Irish Appeal case in the English court, threw doubts on the new Irish appellate jurisdiction. So violent did the clamour become that the English Ministry, anxious to show their good faith, finally brought in an Act of Renunciation, and extinguished the controversy. But the ill effects remained behind. It did not improve the relations between the two countries, and it led to great personal wranglings amongst Irish politicians. Flood constituted himself the champion of the Volunteers, many of whom resented the premature manner in which Grattan had spoken of their disbandment. For the first, but by no means the last time, Grattan had to experience the fickleness

of popular moods. When he left Dublin in July for a short holiday to recruit his health at Spa, he had sunk temporarily to the position occupied by Flood at the beginning of the year. It was when he returned in the autumn that the celebrated scene occurred in Parliament, when Grattan for once lost his temper with his vain and unamiable old rival, and delivered that stinging invective which is by a long way the most Demosthenic piece in English oratory. The oratorical art with which he sketched an imaginary character stroke by stroke, and then, in his last sentence, burst suddenly into the second person, the pictures drawn of this imaginary gentleman, who was sitting purple with indignation but a few yards off, 'standing with a metaphor in his mouth and a bribe in his pocket,' or 'coasting the upper benches of the House like a bird of prey, with an evil aspect and a sepulchral note,' and the tone of triumph with which the last long period is brought to a close in a plain and straightforward personal insult, have been handed down to posterity, to colour the views of a generation whose acquaintance with 'Grattan's Parliament' is limited to this and a few other similar incidents. It was an unseemly wrangle, and Grattan's speech was not in the best of taste: but our literature is the richer for this offspring of the simple repeal dispute.

On the actual controversy Flood was clearly in



the wrong. Nothing could be more admirable than the spirit in which Grattan met his pettifogging arguments. 'What the ethics of the member may be, I know not: but this I know, that the good faith which he repudiates is the great bond of civil society, and the only bond of nations.' And again, 'What! have we delivered ourselves from the British nation to be referred to the quibble of Westminster Hall or to the charity of her Parliament? The emancipation of Ireland I have heard of,—but the manumission of Ireland is a new idea.' And there are pages more in the same strain, the spirit of Burke condensed into epigrams at every turn. But on one point Flood was certainly in the right. He was able to prove by chapter and verse that English public opinion did not understand the nature of what Grattan always liked to call the Irish Revolution of 1782. The repeal of 6 Geo. I and Poynings' law was easily managed: but it was not so easy to change the attitude of a whole nation. Even in that very year it was discovered that Ireland had again been included by name in one or two English Acts. The mistake is said to have been due to the clerk who drafted them. But he was not the only Englishman who declined to disabuse himself of an obsolete idea. Englishmen went on talking of Ireland as a province, whilst Irishmen called her a nation. The tone of the debates at Dublin and at Westminster



must strike an attentive reader as very dissimilar. Both used the same words, but the spirit in which they used them was not the same. They were like the Jesuit and the Dominican in Pascal's *Provincial Letters*, who agreed both to believe in efficacious grace, but to hold different views as to the meaning of the term.

It is probable that Grattan, despite his English connexions, never quite realized in imagination the immense difficulties which such a situation foreboded. Had he done so, he would have taken care to impress on the English Ministry (who after all had not very much time left on their hands to study the vicissitudes of Irish public opinion) the imperative duty of avoiding any policy which might bring these conflicting views into collision. Unfortunately, the short history of the independent Irish Parliament is chiefly a history of such collisions. No sooner had Ireland recovered from the simple repeal controversy than Pitt confronted her with the commercial propositions: and four years after that, the differences again became acute on the question of the Regency. These were both difficulties which a little foresight and a little imagination in England and in Ireland might have avoided. We might even say that in these days of quick communication and the possibility of rapid interchange of views, such misunderstandings could not possibly have occurred. As it was, these

repeated shocks seriously undermined the position of the Irish Parliament, and gravely interfered with the good work it attempted with regard to the domestic affairs of the island.

And that, after all, was the root of the matter. Grattan was, as yet, a little too apt to stand upon his dignity as a politician, and to forget the great objects for which alone constitutions and parliaments exist. Burke, always ready with the right thought at the right moment, forewarned him of the danger. He was too clear a thinker to be blind to the perils of Grattan's settlement. No one has pointed out more clearly than he the defects of principle involved in its construction. But he was no doctrinaire: his first thought was to promote that cordiality between the two countries which Grattan had unwittingly made more imperative than ever. 'Go on and prosper,' he writes from his Paymaster's office in the summer of 1782, 'improve the liberty you have obtained by your virtue, as a means of national prosperity and internal as well as external union.'

The first thing Grattan did after his return from Belgium was to get married. His wife was a Miss Henrietta Fitzgerald, who was descended from the old Desmond family. Grattan, who was very much attached to her, married her just after she had passed through a very severe illness, from the

effects of which she never recovered. For the last twenty years of her husband's life she was a confirmed invalid, and spent a large part of her time in English watering-places, whither Grattan, sometimes to the endangering of his political position, nearly always accompanied her. After his marriage he bought a place at Tinnehinch, a romantic glen in county Wicklow, on which he had long ago set his eye. Though he had another estate in Queen's County, it was at Tinnehinch, amongst the mountains he loved, that he finally settled down and made his home. He had three sons, and from the glimpses which the second, his biographer, gives of his family life, it was such as even Cowper would approve for a statesman in retirement.

— He was soon called back to active life by the conduct of Flood. But it was not long before he was confronted with a more formidable adversary. The Volunteers had now degenerated into nothing better than armed propagandists, and were holding meetings, under the presidency of an eccentric bishop, to advocate Parliamentary reform. The English Ministry, who had been assured by Grattan that the 'account was closed,' were seriously alarmed. They realized how fatal it would be to make any concessions, however desirable, to such an agitation. Fox began to talk of civil war and separation as likely eventualities, if the very year after so lavish a handful of concessions saw Ireland

again in a new ferment, with a fresh list of complaints. He relied on Grattan to intervene; and Grattan, with the powerful aid of Lord Charlemont, was as good as his word. In December, 1783, after several months of agitated and fitful existence, the Volunteers in full Convention decided to disband.

With their disappearance, popular excitement gradually subsided. English attention was absorbed by the inglorious end of the Coalition Ministry, and the young Pitt's amazing struggle for supremacy. The Irish Parliament was left free to make full trial of its new constitution.

### III.

It was necessary to enter with such minuteness into the events which preceded the repeal of the law of 1719, in order to give some idea of the working of the old system, the rapidity with which it collapsed, and, above all, the aggregation of difficulties under which Grattan made his attempt to replace it. He had been playing with edged tools: an immense and restless citizen army, a body of partisans united in enthusiasm, but not in opinion, a Ministry torn by internal dissensions, with half a dozen urgent questions on its hands, and an English electorate, argued into submission for the moment, but sullen and ungracious under the lesson of continuous defeat.

Grattan well knew the nature of the instruments he had used, and his first and most burning desire was to disembarass himself of them at the earliest possible moment. But there is a Nemesis that waits upon those who play lightly with agitations. Grattan was not a strong enough man to handle such a weapon with impunity. He was soon to see it turned against the very objects on behalf of which he had drawn it, the national life and prosperity of Ireland.



Grattan, it must be remembered, was the only man in the two countries who knew what all this agitation was about. Irishmen were too much occupied with the long string of grievances entailed by the law of 1719 to consider the whole question of international relations. It was never seriously grappled with in the Irish Parliament. Lawyers like Yelverton and Fitzgibbon harked back to precedents: but only Grattan realized that the agitation of 1782 marked the beginning of a new epoch. Antiquarians might consult Molyneux for the position of Ireland under the Plantagenets. Grattan would have been quite ready, in a good cause, to cull an argument from King Brien himself. But he alone saw that it was a moment, not for consulting the past, but for making the future. As for the English Ministry, they were thoroughly befogged. A few days before Grattan produced his demands, Fox was really 'not sufficiently master of the particular points between the two countries to discuss them.' Rockingham tells Charlemont a day or two later that he is going to sit down and think them out. As for Shelburne, who had views of his own somewhere at the back of his head, Lord Loughborough, representing a minority of one in the House of Lords, and manipulating a few obvious points with ordinary legal acumen, drove him back from fastness to fastness till he found refuge in

that sanctuary of the embarrassed minister, repetition<sup>1</sup>.

The scheme that Grattan brought forward on April 19, was, then, the fruit of his own independent study of law and history. It was as much the child of his own brain as its still-born successor, the Home Rule Bill of 1886, was the child of Mr. Gladstone's. He meditated it, we are told, pacing up and down the Bower of Vanessa, at Celbridge. And, indeed, there was too little of the library in its composition. There must be two sides to any scheme which defines the relations between England and Ireland: it must set forth, firstly, the basis of imperial connexion, and, secondly, the details of local, or, as Grattan liked to call it 'municipal' administration. The grand defect of Grattan's scheme is that it leaves the first, and what now seems indisputably the most important side of the subject, entirely untouched. His idea was a very natural one: to redress certain grievances caused by the encroachment of England upon Irish liberties, and to leave the whole machine of the constitution of the two countries as he found it. But a surgeon does not amputate a limb without looking to the general health of the patient. Grattan cannot claim to be considered a great statesman, still less a great political thinker; for, friend and pupil of Burke as

<sup>1</sup> Vide Lords' debate of May 17, 1782.

he was, he did not 'study the humours of the body politic.' The consequence was that, where he hoped to heal, he did nothing but inflame, and where he imagined he had applied a purge, he had only made corruption more inevitable.

To look at his settlement more closely, the grievances which he abolished were three in number. He enumerates them to Fox as four—a foreign legislature, a foreign judicature, a legislative Privy Council, and a perpetual army. But the last of these, a perpetual army, would go as soon as Ireland ceased to be bound by English Acts.

Of these three, one at least was sprung upon the world for the first time in Grattan's speech. There had been no mention of the restoration of the Irish Final Court of Appeal in the Volunteer and county meetings, or at the Dungannon Convention. Grattan 'positively refused' we are told<sup>1</sup>, to discuss his settlement with Portland or his secretary in the only two available days. Thus this part of the scheme was as novel to the Castle as it was to the ministers in England. As a matter of fact, they regarded it as the most acceptable part of the project. But had it been the most objectionable, they could have done little else than yield.

The Privy Council had, of course, asked for the attention of reformers by its insertion of the perpetual clause into the Mutiny Bill. But here

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Fitzpatrick, *Life*, ii. 277.

again, Grattan was dealing on his own initiative with a very difficult question, and without sufficiently mastering its details. He little thought that by omitting to fasten as tightly as he should have done this one seemingly insignificant little bolt in the machinery of his scheme, he was exposing the whole of it to the danger of imminent collapse. The question he failed to ask himself, and which became acute seven years later in the Regency dispute, certainly seemed trivial enough. It was this. Was the Royal assent to Irish bills given by the King in the English Privy Council, i. e. as King of Great Britain, or was it given by him subsequently, as King of Ireland? What Grattan's scheme did was, firstly, to deprive the Irish Privy Council of the share which it had usurped by usage in the legislative functions of the Irish Parliament. That was a simple matter on which there was no disagreement. As to the English Privy Council, Irishmen, speaking through Grattan, declared that they did 'most sincerely wish that all bills which have become law in Ireland should receive the approbation of his Majesty under the seal of Great Britain.' Now this was interpreted by the English ministers<sup>1</sup>, the other party to the 'treaty,' to imply that England abandoned her claim to alter or suppress

<sup>1</sup> See Shelburne's answer to Loughborough in Lords, May 17, 1782.

Irish bills in her Privy Council, while Ireland, on her part, acknowledged the British supremacy by making the passage of her bills through the English Council an indispensable preliminary to the Royal assent. Now in 1789 the question arose whether the Regent of Ireland could have different powers from the Regent of England. Grattan, anxious to emphasize the importance of the Irish national assembly, very imprudently led his countrymen into the thick of the controversy then raging in England between Pitt and Fox. Into the events of the dispute it is not here necessary to enter. It is of no consequence whether Grattan and Fox were right in wishing to proceed by address, or Pitt, in proceeding by bill; or whether there was any right or wrong, any need for quoting precedents, involved in the question at all. The important thing is that Grattan, in an evident haste to be first in the field, moved an address to confer on the Prince of Wales powers different in important respects from those conferred on him by the English Parliament.

The Crown lawyers, led by Fitzgibbon, met this by appealing to Grattan's own address in 1782. By it, Irish Acts passed under the Great Seal of England, that is, the seal of the King of England. Therefore the supreme ruler of Ireland, the personage who gave Royal assent to Irish Acts, was not a King of Ireland with prerogatives of his



own. The Irish claim, therefore, to set up a Prince Regent of their own with distinct prerogatives must be disallowed.

This reasoning was unanswerable. Grattan retorted upon Fitzgibbon in his best manner, accusing him of playing 'tricks with signs and seals,' and tried to maintain, by an obvious quibble, that the King first affixed his seal in the English Council and then, by a separate and distinct process, gave his Royal assent to them as King of Ireland.

The King recovered, and the Regent's power was not yet to be exercised. The Irish Parliament succumbed between two fits of insanity. But the question was for a short time very acute, and it was never forgotten. Men in England began to ask themselves, much as we should ask ourselves if we heard talk of a King of Australia, what it was, at bottom, beyond the accident of position, which united England with her restless neighbour? It was a subtle question, and plain men do not love constitutional metaphysics. But the words 'King of Ireland' indicate the breadth of the gulf which separated the two parties to the 'treaty' of 1782.

In the work of decentralization there was, then, this grave flaw. But this was small beside the ugly defects in the old constitution which Grattan had now deliberately exposed to view, and declined to patch up. He left the two countries with two independent legislatures and one executive. In

other words, he left Ireland with two masters, an alien administration, and an unreformed and unreliable Parliament. Thus he failed to secure her the one thing essential to a free people—a Ministry responsible to public opinion. The British constitution, from which he drew his model, is difficult enough to grasp in detail. But its interpreters have always laid their finger upon this as the secret of its success, that Parliament in the last resort holds the sovereign power of control. It is this, and not an ephemeral refutation of Bolingbroke, which, if Grattan had but had the eyes to see it, is the lesson of his early textbook, the *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*. Every word of that masterpiece is tenfold more applicable to Ireland after 1782, than to England in 1770. 'The people will endeavour to keep the House of Commons for its existence, its power and its privileges, as independent of every other, and as dependent upon themselves, as possible. This servitude is to an House of Commons (like obedience to the Divine law) perfect freedom. For if they once quit this natural, rational and liberal obedience, having deserted the only proper foundation of their power, they must seek a support in an abject and unnatural dependence somewhere else.' And when a Lord-Lieutenant has succeeded in fulfilling this prediction, 'that last of evils will predominate in the country—men without popular confidence,

public opinion, natural connexion or natural trust invested with all the powers of Government.'

By neglecting to secure responsibility, Grattan doomed his scheme from the outset. It was well, perhaps, to follow Burke rather than the Duke of Richmond, in thinking parliamentary reform too dangerous a surgical operation in the present state of the national distemper. It was well, for the present, to attempt to work parliamentary institutions without insisting on any immediate repeal of the laws excluding three-quarters of the nation from a share in them. But to expose a powerful and wayward body of men, nearly all of whom not election, but character and patriotism alone, could make representative of the nation, to constant collision with an authority which had a monopoly of the temptations of wealth, rank, and office, was almost inevitably to replace a weak and shadowy Parliament by a corrupt and irresponsible oligarchy. The rule of Ireland under Grattan's settlement was, in fact, an ingenious blend of native oligarchy with a despotism controlled by an alien democracy, a system well calculated to bring out the worst qualities inherent both in absolute and in popular government. That 'Grattan's Parliament,' despite every obstacle, did in fact perform so much useful work for Ireland, and would still have a claim, for that reason only, on the national memory, is a tribute rather to the patriotic

ability of Irishmen than to the political sagacity of Grattan.

No one perceived this fatal defect in later days more clearly than Grattan himself, though he never publicly confessed his share in the blame for it. In a speech delivered in 1791, he formulated the most powerful indictment that was ever made against his own settlement. As the arguments of a man, a little vain (it must be confessed) of his own achievements, and certainly better entitled than any one else to know the workings of the system, it is worth extensive quotation. 'Ireland,' he complains, 'is deprived, in the present administration of her affairs, of the two great sanctions held necessary to restrain the malignity of human crimes, the law of punishment and the law of reputation; and the public weal of this country is left for its preservation to the remote apprehension which her ministers may entertain of Divine vengeance, and to their pious speculations on a future state of reward and punishment.' Again, 'The Irish Government, in its perverted state, is composed of responsible officers who are not resident, and resident officers who are not responsible.' The Irish Parliament, on the other hand, is composed of 'a set of men excluded in their native land from power and control, privileged only to submit their objections without any authority to stop the crime they complain of.' Parliament

pretends it has the control of supply. Yes, it can vote or withhold the money, but 'is excluded from all control over its disbursement. That control is placed exclusively in the Lord-Lieutenant's secretary, his Excellency' (in this order!) 'and certain English officers.' Only one expedient, besides the bare negative on supply, is left to the Irish House. It is what Grattan calls, his swelling words concealing the hollowness of their pretension, its 'inquisitorial power as the grand inquest of the nation,' the unexercised prerogative of impeachment. It is clear that, under this peculiar dual system, the primary responsibility lay with the Lord-Lieutenant. Though he held one prerogative and Parliament the other, he unquestionably had the chief place in the constitution, both by his control over the Judicature, and by the influence which he could indirectly bring to bear upon the representatives. Grattan's scheme, therefore, simply assumed the presence of a beneficent despot at the Castle—in those days a hazardous and, as the event showed, an unjustifiable assumption. That Grattan should have it at all is a startling reminder of the gap that lies between his views and ours.

So much for the internal affairs of Ireland. Irishmen could now pass laws, but they could not enforce them. They could vote money, but they could not spend it. Grattan's scheme left



the position of Ireland in the face of the world in a still more unsatisfactory condition. He did not have the courage to ask English ministers the plain question—‘Shall Ireland henceforward be a kingdom, a colony, or a province?’ We have seen that his own theory (which was not in strict accordance with the facts) regarded Ireland as a kingdom, separate from England, but united under the same crown, much in the same way as Hungary is separate from Austria or Norway from Sweden. These were actually analogies used in 1886 by Mr. Gladstone. Ireland would on that theory<sup>1</sup> be in the full sense a nation. She would have her own international relations, her own army and navy, her own laws of succession, her own commercial arrangements. These, of course, are exactly the points which Mr. Gladstone, despite his analogies, excepted from the powers of the Irish Legislature he proposed to create. Grattan’s scheme simply ignored them. The result was, inevitably, the two ugly quarrels of 1785 and 1789.

The succession question was left undecided, but Ireland vindicated her right not to be bound by English commercial legislation. Had it not been for the selfish traditions of English com-

<sup>1</sup> Not, necessarily, in actual practice. Convenience, as opposed to strict theory, might, for instance, dictate a common diplomatic service, as in the case of Norway and Sweden.

merce, such a right would not have been worth claiming. For, on any theory, Ireland could only legislate for her own shores, and it is difficult to see how she could think it more profitable to maintain her right to wage a tariff war against England, rather than let herself be merged in the commercial policy and development of the whole Empire.

The project of an Irish navy was mooted by Yelverton in the Irish Commons in 1780. The home Ministry did not at all like the idea, and Lord North, with his tongue in his cheek, said, 'he thought it would be feasible provided the ships remained under the charge of the Admiralty.' In other words, Ireland could pay the sailors, but England would use them. And this was as a matter of fact what was done: for the Irish Commons voted £100,000 for the English navy in 1782, thus setting a precedent lately followed by the Government at the Cape<sup>1</sup>.

Similarly with foreign relations. It was ridiculous for Ireland to set up as an independent kingdom, when she sent no ambassadors and made no treaties, and when a British minister could at any moment expose her shores to invasion. The question of the right of the Irish Parliament to interfere with treaties actually came

<sup>1</sup> The only ships Ireland ever possessed were revenue cruisers, of which there were half a dozen in 1783.

up at the time when Grattan was meditating his settlement, and he does not appear to have perceived its significance. The Portuguese refused to admit Irish woollens into their country, basing their action on an old British commercial treaty made in 1703. It was a delicate matter, for England was at war with France and Spain, and Portugal was a valuable ally. Grattan's speech in the Irish House upon the subject is not preserved: but neither he nor any one else was in favour of the interference of Ireland as a separate nation safeguarding her commercial rights<sup>1</sup>.

There remains only the question of the army. ✓ This was the one respect in which Ireland, even before 1782, could claim to be a nation. She maintained a peace establishment of 15,000 men, at a time when Great Britain maintained only 17,000-18,000. During recent years Parliament had allowed a large part of this force to be employed in the American war, and it was the consequent lack of regular troops in the years 1778-82 which made the Volunteers really necessary for defensive purposes. Thus, when the pinch came, Ireland

<sup>1</sup> The English Ministry took this for granted, but it was never settled in black and white. See Fox's letter in *Grattan's Life*, iii. 110. 'To lay treaties before an assembly to which we are not responsible would be only an idle compliment at best, but might be in the end productive of some of the worst consequences which are to be found under the *peculiar relations* in which the two kingdoms now stand one to another.'

did not find the troops she raised and paid for of very much use for her own purposes, either offensive (if she had needed them) or defensive. Indeed, had it not been for the unfortunate controversy about the Mutiny Bill, Irishmen might have been ready to forego their army, and adopt the same policy towards the land as towards the sea forces of the Empire. As it was, Ireland continued, of course, to raise and to pay for her troops, though she had no voice in the policy for which they fought, and was even to see them fighting against their own fellow countrymen.

Thus of the five prerogatives which, materially speaking, give a country an international position, succession, foreign relations, navy, army, and commerce, Grattan secured his countrymen only the last two, and those, as it turned out, unprofitably. The others were left to be scrambled for as circumstances arose. Two out of the five occasioned grave disputes in the eighteen years during which the settlement lasted. On this side therefore, Grattan's settlement was really, as was said at starting, no settlement at all. But, lest we be accused of blaming Grattan for not effecting what he never undertook to perform, it is well to recall the rash prophecy made by the Irish Commons to their sovereign on his acceptance of their demands. 'We do assure His Majesty,' so ran the unanimous address, 'that no constitutional

question between the two countries will any longer exist, and that Great Britain as she has approved of our firmness, so may she rely upon our affection.'

But if Grattan's work, then, was doomed to failure from the first, it becomes important to ask whether there was any practicable alternative settlement. Now, though all such speculations are, of course, hazardous, it is not fair to say that the failure of the Union proves that they are impossible. After Grattan's scheme had once been tried, things could never return into their old groove. History does not allow nations to make one experiment after another and resume their original position between each attempt. In 1782 the spell was cast. 'Ireland,' cried Grattan, 'is a nation, and bowing to her august presence I say, "esto perpetua."' From that moment, all projects of a Union were doomed to failure. Even if it could have been carried (as it could not) without a systematic policy of national degradation, it could never have succeeded. For, in that case, the Parliament would simply not have represented the new Irish nation. We must consider the question, then, from the standpoint of 1782, and not from that of 1800.

Grattan had to deal with a great stirring of the popular mind. It was not of his own making: he was not an irresponsible agitator, puffing up



national feeling for personal or any other ends. He was borne forward on the crest of the wave, but his eloquence and his abilities gave him a certain mastery. Like all political leaders among a free people, his duty was neither wantonly to swell nor pedantically to arrest popular enthusiasm, but to guide, to control, to purify.

Now it seems clear from the course of events in the critical years 1775-82, that the Irish aspirations of which Grattan constituted himself the exponent, were as yet but dimly and doubtfully conceived. Negatively, Irish demands were distinct enough. There were grievances against the commercial selfishness of the English manufacturers and the extravagant maladministration of the Castle. But the agitation, as Grattan was almost alone in detecting, went deeper than this. It had a real positive element. It shadowed forth a national demand. So far Grattan was right. But was he right in going on to interpret that demand as one which could only be satisfied by making Ireland, politically and internationally, a nation? The question whether Ireland would have been thus satisfied must be left unsolved: for, as we saw, Ireland has never in her history been, politically speaking, a nation. But there is some evidence which goes towards showing that this would not have been the only way of fulfilling her aspirations.

To begin with, the stir which is observable in Irish life from 1770 onwards ran through the whole nation. It was not confined to the Protestants or to the aristocracy. This is the moral of the Volunteer agitation, of the unfeigned satisfaction of the Catholics at the freeing of Parliament, and of the gradual amelioration, both of the provisions of the Penal Code and of the condition of the mass of the people, undertaken, and partially carried out, by that Parliament. There was, it must be remembered, very little religious animosity in the Ireland of Grattan's youth. There was, indeed, a constant undercurrent of Whiteboyism, due largely to the abuses of tithe: but here there was no religious motive involved. The provisions of the Code were only not abolished because they were largely not observed. Catholics did not begin to agitate for emancipation till Protestants forgot that they were Christians. All the better men among the Established Bishops regarded themselves as ministering to Irishmen of all opinions<sup>1</sup>. The greatest of contemporary Irish preachers became a Protestant, not for doctrinal reasons, but 'because he felt he could do more good in that community<sup>2</sup>,' and proved it by getting

<sup>1</sup> For Berkeley, e. g., see his *Querist*, and, especially, *A Word to the Wise*.

<sup>2</sup> See a letter of Kirwan's, written a day or two after his 'conversion,' and quoted from his *Life* by Lecky, vi. 447.

no preferment. Grattan's interpretation of the awakening national feeling did nothing to give effect to this growing sentiment of union among Irishmen. All it did was to perpetuate, in a more visible and striking form, the chief symbol of the old unhappy divisions. So long as Parliament was comparatively powerless, the exclusion of Catholics was a small matter; after 1782 it soon became a burning question, and remained so for over forty years.

Moreover, it is noticeable that even Grattan never speaks of Ireland as a kingdom. He prefers the word nation. This is in itself a tacit recognition that the sentiment he had to deal with, and which it is his prime merit as a statesman to have recognized as irresistible, was not primarily political, but rather racial and social. With Grattan rests the responsibility for turning Irish aspirations into political channels. In other words, it was he who made a collision between England and Ireland inevitable. It is part of the pathos of the whole story that Grattan never realized what he had done. He was himself as thorough an Englishman in politics, and as thorough an Irishman in sentiment, as all Irishmen might have been had he but allowed them. He supported the French war, went strongly against Fox, sent two sons on the Walcheren expedition, and made one of his finest speeches the month before

Waterloo, against the peace party of the day. The feeling running through that speech refutes the wording which the orator, sadly enough, felt bound to use. He speaks to Englishmen in the second person, 'your resources, your empire,' but his spirit is the spirit of those Irish statesmen who have spent their minds in the service of the Empire, and of whom no one stopped to inquire what was the place of their birth. Burke and Sheridan at home (one dares not mention Castle-reagh), Wellesley and his more famous brother abroad, are only a few out of a host of witnesses against the fancied incompatibility between Irish and British sentiment.

For this, in truth, is the real Irish Question. What looks like an elementary problem, settled once and for all by the laws of geography, is bound up, at bottom, with the inscrutable mysteries of national development. It is clear from the map that England and Ireland must never run the risk of becoming enemies. The question to be answered is whether they can possibly be friends.

But perhaps it is worth while pausing to drive home the geographical argument; for Grattan himself had to learn it by bitter experience, and some of his followers have never learned it at all.

Materially speaking, Ireland has everything to gain by friendship and political connexion with

England, and nothing to lose. From it Irishmen gain protection for their shores and their trade, and the prospect of successful military, commercial, or administrative careers. From this point of view, the grant of Free Trade was everything; all that remained after 1780 was to settle the principle of all outstanding commercial questions. Burke, whom no one could accuse of not being a patriotic Irishman, has put his point once and for all. 'In the name of God,' he asks in a letter to a Roman Catholic Bishop in 1795, 'what grievance has Ireland, as Ireland, to complain of with regard to Great Britain, unless the protection of the most powerful country upon earth—giving all her privileges, without exception, in common to Ireland, and reserving to herself only the painful pre-eminence of tenfold burdens—be a matter of complaint. As a member of the Empire' (Burke, unlike his biographer, never shrinks from the word), 'an Irishman has every privilege of a natural-born Englishman, in every part of it, in every occupation, and in every branch of commerce.' And, descending to details which Irish patriots have been very apt to ignore, he emphasizes the immense advantages derived by Ireland from the use of English capital. 'That Ireland, if independent,' he goes on, 'would come to make a figure amongst the nations is an idea which has more of the ambition of individuals in



it than of a sober regard to the happiness of a whole people. But if a people were to sacrifice solid quiet to empty glory, as on some occasions they have done, under the circumstances of Ireland, *she*, most assuredly never would obtain that independent glory, but would certainly lose all her tranquillity, all her prosperity, and even that degree of lustre which she has by the very free and very honourable connexion she enjoys with a nation the most splendid and the most powerful upon earth.' Then, summing up, he gives his verdict in words which will hold good until the seas which make her what she is, merge Ireland, like a second Atlantis, with the buried kingdoms of the earth. 'Ireland constitutionally is independent, politically, she can never be. *It is a struggle against nature.*'

But history and politics show us only too plainly that it is the destiny of some nations to struggle against nature. When the desire for political independence has entered into a nation, nothing short of extinction can cast it out. Must we rank Ireland with the Polands of the earth? Is she a nation, incurably bitten with a desire, the satisfaction of which would, as Burke told her, lead inevitably to her ruin? To-day, after a century of misunderstanding and misgovernment, the answer to this question may be doubtful. But in the days when Grattan held the future destinies of Ireland

in his grasp, there could be only one answer. Not only by the accident of position, but by the more compelling force of national character, England and Ireland were made to be friends. In the light of recent history this may seem a hard saying; but the burden of proof lies surely with those who would affirm this one exception to the successful influences of British character to be inevitably due to the nature of the two forces at work. Ireland has always been the Cinderella in the imperial household: but she has always felt herself a true-born daughter. 'Your most Excellent Majesty,' pleads Molyneux to William III in 1698, 'is the Common Indulgent Father of all your Countries; and have an Equal Regard to the Birthrights of all your Children; and will not permit the Eldest, because the Strongest, to encroach on the Possessions of the Younger.' And as to the project of a legislative union (which, it must not be forgotten, had actually been realized during the Parliaments of the Commonwealth), 'we should be willing enough,' he says, 'to embrace it; but this is an Happiness we can hardly hope for<sup>1</sup>.' 'The Common Indulgent Father' burnt the pamphlet, dedication and all: but this was the spirit in which a union was regarded down to the time of Grattan's own birth. It only became

<sup>1</sup> *The Case of Ireland*, by William Molyneux, Dublin, 1698, dedication and pp. 97-8.

unpopular when England had convinced Irishmen of her utter unfitness to be entrusted with Irish affairs. Her commercial exclusiveness made it more profitable for Irish landlords to live in England, and the Irish feeling against absenteeism naturally led to a prejudice against England. With the grant of Free Trade these causes were removed. They were revived again by the sectarian bigotry which arose in the English Parliament and maintained the long and disgraceful struggle against Catholic emancipation. But in 1782 that question had not yet arisen. It was Grattan who, by initiating and carrying through the campaign of independence, supplied the opponents of a legislative Union with a positive argument, which more than counterbalanced the removal of the commercial grievances in 1780. We are not here arguing for the narrow and rigid political device miscalled a Union. What it is important to establish is that the principle which in Pitt's eyes made that device necessary, the inalienable political dependence of Ireland upon England, was not tamely acquiesced in by Irishmen as a law of political geography, but was for a long time gratefully accepted as the natural and inevitable condition of their political development.

Grattan himself, as we have seen, never really assented to the doctrine of Irish political independence, with all its logical consequences. So far

as Irish nationalism<sup>1</sup> was concerned, he was a blind leader of the blind. For it is certain that the majority of his countrymen never really contemplated a 'Kingdom of Ireland' separate from England, and with power to fix its own royal succession. Englishmen have never even tried to realize it. On the two occasions when it has seriously been put before them as a possibility, in 1798 and in 1886, it has paralyzed their sense of obligation towards Ireland for a generation. Arthur Young, writing just after the grant of Free Trade, dismisses as incredible, the idea that an agitation for an independent Parliament will ever arise. Years before, Chatham, with the eye of a true statesman, foresaw trouble in the power of the Irish Parliament to control the executive in the matter of the army: but he ended his life an opponent to the idea of a Union (which he had once entertained), for reasons which are likely to become prophetic. A Union would, he thought, degrade the character of the British Parliament, by making it unwieldy, noisy, and inharmonious.

But one line of objection is still open. It may be said that the Ireland whose voice has been represented in these arguments is not the true Ireland. It is only the voice of the Protestant minority, who are chiefly responsible for the Union of 1800, and who look to England as a

<sup>1</sup> The word is used in its natural meaning ; what those who use it as a party label mean by it does not signify.

refuge against their Roman Catholic fellow countrymen, and as a means of maintaining their own ascendancy. This argument, as the historian of Irish opinion, himself an Irish Protestant, has proved in detail, is simply an anachronism. The idea and the name of this new Protestant ascendancy were born in those eighteen years, to which Irishmen look back with so much affection, and which gave birth, through the whole of Europe, but nowhere more than in Ireland, to such strange and illfated children. The very word itself was 'struck in the mint of the Castle of Dublin<sup>1</sup>,' after the passing of the first measure of Catholic Emancipation in the Irish Parliament. The wretched religious animosities which have never ceased to distract Ireland since the day of that unhappy coinage, were not part of the situation in 1782. They passed harmlessly over the heads of men like Burke and Grattan. Nowadays men are surprised that Grattan, an austere Protestant, should have spent most of his life battling for the Catholics. Nothing in Grattan's speeches or in Burke's writings indicates that their contemporaries felt the same astonishment. The truth is that, politically speaking, the people of Ireland were at that time united. It was not true then, and it is not true now, that the Catholic population of Ireland is bound to cherish political sentiments antagonistic to those of England. The

<sup>1</sup> Burke's *Works*, vi. 391 (ed. Nimmo, 1899).



idea has gained currency amongst those who know neither the Irish Catholics, nor their ideals, nor their literature, but their representatives. Nowadays the Catholics play a larger part in Irish politics than they did in 1782: that did not lie beyond the ken of a wise statesman in that day. Grattan knew that he was legislating, not for the minority of his countrymen who sent representatives to Dublin, but for the whole body of Irishmen who were, at that moment, in sympathy with those representatives. Ireland is, once and for all, a Catholic country, and the national ideal which Grattan was guiding, was one conceived by men born and bred in the atmosphere of Catholic Christianity. Through want of knowledge, patience, and imagination, Grattan misinterpreted that ideal. He was not yet Irishman enough to feel it. There was much for which he may claim excuse. The Catholics, as a body, were ignorant, impressionable, and inarticulate. They seemed to be passive, if interested, spectators of the struggles of their Protestant fellow countrymen. Their leaders were either Protestant-minded noblemen like Lord Kenmare, or eighteenth-century philosophers, like Father O'Leary. But they were gradually coming to be conscious of themselves as the nucleus of a nation, and to formulate a national ideal.

That ideal has been sadly disturbed and distorted by the march of events. But if one reads it aright, as reflected in the Irish life of the last century, or

(which comes to the same thing) in the scanty output of its English-speaking literature, it is not a nationalist or an anti-English ideal. It is the cry of a lonely people, unkindly used by nature, by history, and by its rulers, but, despite all, clinging with a passionate devotion to its land and its traditions, and appealing with childlike simplicity to the mercy of the Government from which it has endured so many and cruel disappointments. The fruit of the conflict between Government and this love of land and traditions is nationalism, as in the stern notes of 'God Save Ireland,' or the softer, sadder tones of 'The Wearing of the Green.' But it is not an unchanging or inevitable conflict. What Ireland wanted last century, and what the remnant which famine and emigration have left of her active spirits still desire, is not selfish power, but opportunity for service, not the chief seats in a petty kingdom, but fellowship in the society of imperial workers. But there are not so many active spirits in Ireland as there were. And thus it is that, above the sound of the national outcry which Grattan so misinterpreted, we hear the keener and more imperious accents of a new demand—the demand of a nation which has never known what happiness means, pleading, after the failure of so many bungling strangers, to be allowed to make itself happy in its own way, or, at least, as the great Frederic put it, to choose its own road to blessedness.

There was then, theoretically speaking, and in the light of history, a better way open to Grattan in 1782, a way which would have brought peace and satisfaction to Ireland without an inevitable collision with England. And it was a practicable policy—down to the smallest detail. It was moreover a policy which, if Grattan had only allowed them time, the Whig ministry would very likely have adopted. Grattan himself supplied the key in the word so often on his lips, so seldom in his thoughts—Treaty. The principle is Burke's. In a letter<sup>1</sup> dictated from his couch within four months of his death, he sketches this outline of a scheme. 'My poor opinion is that the closest connexion between Great Britain and Ireland is essential to the well-being, I had almost said to the very being, of the two kingdoms. For that purpose I humbly conceive that the whole of the superior and what I should call imperial politics ought to have its residence here, and that Ireland, locally, civilly, and commercially independent, ought politically to look up to Great Britain in all matters of peace or of war; in all these points to be guided by her: and in a word, with her to live and to die. At bottom, Ireland has no other choice—I mean, no other rational choice.'

This outline is filled in by a scheme detailed by Arthur Young<sup>2</sup>, which he purports to have

<sup>1</sup> Burke, vi. 420.

<sup>2</sup> *Tour in Ireland*, Bohn's ed., ii. 250-1.

formed from conversations with Shelburne himself. According to this plan, Ireland is practically to become a self-governing colony with certain peculiar privileges. She is to have no imperial representation, and gives up all power in imperial concerns. The only real sacrifice which this would have involved was, as we have seen, that of the army. Ireland was also to pay a specified contribution into the imperial exchequer, calculated on the basis of the sums voted annually to the two non-domestic items—the military establishment and that bone of contention, the Pension List. This sum is reckoned to be about three quarters of a million. This arrangement would not be of the nature of an indefinite subsidy<sup>1</sup>, and, involving as it did the abolition of the hereditary revenue, it would secure Ireland for the first time what she did not secure till 1791, the power to levy practically all her supplies. On the other side of the bargain, Ireland would receive imperial protection by land and sea, free control over her internal affairs by the repeal of Poynings' Law and 6 Geo. I, and, last of all, complete free trade.

This scheme would certainly seem to satisfy all reasonable Irish political demands. It would have ensured Ireland peace abroad and prosperity within. The only question is whether its introduction just

<sup>1</sup> For Grattan's rooted objection to a 'subsidy' v. Lecky, vi. 396.

at the moment of the American victory would have met with success. It is true that it concedes to Ireland, absolutely and without question, the right to tax herself—and this was of course the source of the American dispute. But the American precedent certainly overshadowed the whole of imperial policy during the few short years of Grattan's agitation; and it is just possible that the spirit of the Declaration of Independence might have worked unfavourably against the scheme in Ireland. But if promulgated and worked in a generous spirit of give and take, it should have succeeded in surmounting such difficulties. For instance, the British Government might have created the precedent of listening to the suggestions of the Irish Parliament on imperial affairs, as conveyed through the Lord-Lieutenant. This may seem to be importing twentieth-century ideas into the eighteenth century. But at that time the differences of temperament between the two countries had not yet become acute. Moreover, the relative position of Ireland was incomparably higher then than now. What Ireland thought on a matter of foreign policy had an effect on English opinion, even if it was in no way officially brought before it. For instance, in 1795 Burke writes gratefully to Grattan and says: 'I am sure that the peace cry was stopped here by its being stopped in Ireland.' And it must be remembered that Grattan's scheme, no less than



Shelburne's, presupposed a change in the prevailing type of Castle administration. Northington, who was sent over by the Whigs in 1783, writes home deprecating the practice of sending to Ireland 'gentlemen taken wild from Brooks', to make their dénouement in political life<sup>1</sup>. It was Pitt, when, disgusted with the failure of his commercial arrangements, he relegated Ireland to a back place in his thoughts, who revived the practice of sending titled nonentities like Buckingham and Westmoreland to control the Government and corrupt the representatives of the sister isle. Still, the Volunteers were undoubtedly a serious temporary obstacle to Shelburne's scheme. But if it did not happen to be acceptable at the moment, that was no reason against its ultimate adoption. Few great agitations have ever succeeded so rapidly as Grattan's. He need not have been in such haste. It should not have been difficult for him to disband the Volunteers by convincing them that the Whig Ministry were really in earnest with reform. He might easily have proceeded with his settlement by instalments. It was quite unnecessary for him to accept the half loaf, and despair of the whole. It is quite true that, having strung his followers up to the highest pitch, he found it difficult to hold the heterogeneous party together. He was not a born leader of men; he had not the intelligence, nor

<sup>1</sup> *Grattan's Life*, iii. 134. His Lordship surely means *début*.

the imagination, nor, as yet, the warm sympathy needful for a popular chief; in a word, he was not a great personality. But he need not have so distrusted the earnest purpose of Irishmen as to think that they would not ultimately rally round the man who expounded their real aspirations, whether himself or another. Lord Clare once told his countrymen, in one of those dangerous half-truths that ring through history, that they were 'easily roused and easily appeased.' It would seem as if Grattan acknowledged the truth of the dictum he so furiously assailed. He learned to know Irishmen better in the day of adversity. Dilemmas are seldom quite fair, but there is a certain amount of truth in the trenchant criticism—'if Grattan believed in his settlement he was a fool; if he did not, he was a knave.' The folly (for folly it was) is pardonable in a man of Grattan's calibre and antecedents. Moreover, it has been repeated by a greater than Grattan. The defects in the Home Rule Bill of 1886 are due to a similar desire to shirk awkward questions and reconcile contradictions. Both Gladstone and Grattan lived to see the consequences of their mistake, spent their last years in vainly trying to remedy it, and died leaving the Irish Question, half-way between history and politics, in that noisy and ill-omened limbo where the shadows of unburied causes wait helplessly for a deliverer. \

#### IV.

On the working of the Irish Parliament during the eighteen years of its independent existence it will not be necessary, in an account of Grattan, to dwell with any minuteness. If the work that he there performed was more satisfactory and more enduring than that with which his name is more especially connected in history, it is because it did not call for the exhibition of exceptional qualities of statesmanship. Where earnest perseverance and highminded impartiality could suffice, Grattan never failed his country. His letters and speeches bear abundant testimony to the zeal with which he engrossed himself in the dullest details of law, economics, and local administration, wherever his legislative duties made it necessary. But, here again, it must be confessed that his heart comes more successfully out of the ordeal than his head. On a plain question of justice, Grattan's oratory was of surpassing service. Such matters come more frequently before parliamentary assemblies than contemporary politicians are willing to recognize. Grattan was never so happy as when his reason allowed him to run full tilt, with a clear conscience, against some monstrous obstruction either newly raised by Castle mismanagement, or

left standing, gaunt and unashamed, as a legacy from the authors of the Penal Code.

On the question of tithes he delivered a series of speeches remarkable, not only for their mastery of exact detail, but for the high and burning religious spirit which breathes through their every line. That the whole population of Ireland, Catholic as well as Protestant, should contribute to the payment of the Established clergy, had not yet, while religious animosities still slumbered, become a matter of general complaint. In the face of the facts this is sufficiently remarkable; for the revenues of the Irish Bishops must appear, even to a generation accustomed to regard bishops' incomes as trusts administered for the general good, to have afforded rather gratuitous temptation. The endowments<sup>1</sup> of the twenty-two Protestant bishoprics amounted to £74,000; exclusive of enormous possessions of land with an annual rental (as Arthur Young tells us) in the Primate's case of £100,000, in those of the Bishops of Cashel and Derry of £50,000 and £30,000 respectively. And all this for a handful of well under half a million Protestants. But neither this, nor, generally speaking, the method of

<sup>1</sup> The income of the church in Ireland amounted (*excluding* bishoprics and universities) to £148 per clergyman, as compared to £150 in England, including these items. This is the computation of an Irish bishop quoted by Grattan, ii. 95. This is not excessive, for, in those days, the Protestant clergy were still able to regard the Catholics as in a sense their parishioners.

rating the tithes was the subject of Grattan's complaint. He was, it is true, in favour of their commutation, and took great pains to draw up a scheme which he expected would give general satisfaction. He did not know that Ireland would have to wait another half century, till 1838, for this obvious reform. But the main point dealt with in his speeches on tithe was the iniquitous method of collection then in vogue. The clergy had gradually ceased to gather in the tithes in person, and this duty had devolved upon middlemen called 'tithe-proctors,' who made a living by swindling both parties. The extent to which this system had been carried can only be made clear by quoting Grattan's own account of it in a speech where he gives chapter and verse for his statements. 'A non-resident clergyman will employ a tithe-farmer, who will set the tithe over again to two blacksmiths who go among the flock like two vultures. A tithe-farmer will, on being questioned, give the following account of himself: that he "held the tithe from one who had them from an officer, who held them from a clergyman who did not reside in a parish." I have known a case' he goes on, 'where the parish made with their clergyman the following agreement: "Sir, we pay your proctor £800 a year, and he gives you £600. We will give you £600 and become your collectors and security."' It seems



almost incredible that a proposal, not to alter the law, but merely to establish a commission to examine into the state of its working, should have been violently opposed by the parochial clergy, especially in the poorer districts. But the Protestant clergy of Munster, conceiving themselves branded as extortioners (which indeed was the exact reverse of the truth), rushed into the field with an ill-worded manifesto against Grattan's 'gross misrepresentations.' Grattan seems to have felt this unexpected opposition as a stain upon the faith which he himself professed. It was 'as if Christ could not prevail over the earth unless Mammon took him by the hand.' 'Offend their God,' he cried bitterly, 'and they will absolve: offend their property, and they persecute.' There is certainly observable in his last and most powerful speech on the subject a tone of bitterness which augured ill for the religious future of Ireland. He lashes himself into a frenzy of oratory against the 'impudent familiarity' which appealed to the Almighty to take part against his poor, and, using one of those oratorical effects of which he was so great a master, the refrain, he deals stroke upon stroke at the 'Parochial clergy of Munster.'

But in the field of economics, where Grattan's Parliament was to fight its first great battle, there was no chance for the display of these qualities. Grattan, it must be confessed, shared with Fox

the distinction of being a poor economist, in the days when Adam Smith's masterpiece was supposed to be at every politician's elbow. This explains why he was silent during the discussion of a law which vitally affected, not only his own settlement, but the whole economic condition of the country. In 1784, after an exceptionally bad harvest, Foster passed a bill granting large bounties on the exportation of corn, coupled with heavy import duties. Now, politically and economically, this measure was of capital importance. Whatever the need of encouraging agriculture as against other forms of country industry, it was highly undesirable to repay England for her grant of free trade by establishing protection. Had the Act not coincided with the rapid replacement of agriculture by manufacture in England, Pitt's difficulties would certainly have been anticipated by a year. But the political significance of the measure seems to have escaped the notice of Grattan, and it was stultified by the scheme which Pitt, with the assent of Irishmen, introduced next year. We should not even know his views on the bill, had we not by chance the opportunity of conjecturing them from a speech he made in the English Parliament in 1815<sup>1</sup>, where he mentions Foster as entitled to high praise for following in the footsteps of Lord Pery. Now Lord Pery's Act, as Grattan

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches*, iv. 367.

ought to have remembered, had been refuted in detail by Arthur Young and repealed as unprofitable in 1797. It established a system of inland bounties on corn, thereby throwing an enormous charge on the Treasury, merely in order to promote land instead of sea transport, and starve the other parts of Ireland at the expense of Dublin. Foster's Act at least avoided these mistakes: but recent experience justifies Arthur Young rather than the Irish statesmen of the day (who are followed by Lecky) in doubting its advisability. Young, speaking on his own subject, declared that too much stress was laid on agriculture, as superior, whatever its quality, to any form of cultivation. He emphasized the importance of waste lands, and the encouragement, where the conditions were unfavourable to agriculture, of cattle-rearing and dairy-farming. All this was beyond Grattan, who does not appear to have been familiar with West-country conditions, and seems to have confused the resources of the green countryside of County Wicklow, with the bleak grey uplands of Clare, and the rock-strewn solitudes of Connaught.

But an economic issue presented itself in 1785 ✓ which he could no longer shirk. Pitt, in reply to an appeal from the Irish Parliament, after immense pains, had drawn up an elaborate scheme which was to regulate the commercial relations between the two kingdoms. The general idea of the scheme

bore the impress of that prudent and yet high-minded statesmanship of which Pitt allowed Ireland to see so little. Unlike his other Irish projects, this was his own original creation. It admitted Ireland 'into a permanent and irrevocable participation of the commercial advantages of England, in return for a grant towards imperial expenses from the overplus of the Irish hereditary revenue.' In other words, it was an instalment of the treaty contemplated by Fox in 1782, although that statesman, with an opportunism which Burke<sup>1</sup>, his friend and colleague, found difficult to justify, now declared the whole project unnecessary, and fought it inch by inch. After an addition made on the insistence of Grattan, who was at least a thorough master of the Irish finances, the resolutions passed the Irish House without a division.

They met with a very different fate at Westminster. The English manufacturers, led by Wedgwood, subjected them to severe criticism, and Pitt, who could not rely on his majority, felt that he would fail to carry them unamended. It was then that he threw away a golden opportunity. Had he told the English Parliament boldly (in the

<sup>1</sup> See his letter after the insertion of the amendments, in *Grattan's Life*, iii. 252. He predicted the grave effects of the Irish rejection of them. Fox showed his misapprehension of the whole subject by his famous phrase, 'I will not barter English commerce for Irish slavery. That is not the price I would pay, nor the thing I would purchase.'

spirit of Grattan three years earlier) that they must take all or nothing, he would probably have lost his measure, but he would certainly have won the lasting gratitude of Ireland. As it was, he lost his measure and Irish confidence together—neither to be replaced. He remodelled his propositions, and unwisely inserted one which encroached on the newly-won liberties of the Irish Parliament. Returning to Dublin in this guise, they were met by the thunders of Grattan and sent back with ignominy to the land of their birth. Pitt was deeply mortified at the issue of his first encounter with Irish opinion. He never treated it with the same consideration again<sup>1</sup>. It is noteworthy that in this debate Grattan, using the word for the first time, characterized Pitt's project as a 'creeping Union.' In truth it was his failure to get the two islands into fighting-trim against Europe in any other way which first brought a Union forcibly before Pitt's notice. Not the least curious feature, however, in the whole transaction is the fact that Pitt calmly included Ireland in a commercial treaty made with France next year, and nothing at all was said about it in Dublin.

The next important subject which arose was

<sup>1</sup> Even Lord Rosebery (*Pitt*, p. 75) falls into the same mistake as Pitt. He quotes 'Timeo Danaos' as the Irish attitude towards the resolutions. This is sufficiently disproved by the reception accorded them in their unamended condition.



that of the Regency. Here that question is only important from the direct way in which it brought the two parties into collision. During the years 1782-89 there was no regularly organized Opposition. Grattan had never quite regained the popularity that he had lost at the time of the Volunteer convention, and Flood had retired to try his luck at Westminster. But the revival of Castle corruption, under the experienced rule of Lord Buckingham, and the increasing prominence of Fitzgibbon, finally drove Grattan into the leadership. The Regency Question, being his own subject, caused him to appear publicly in that position. Henceforward Parliament was to witness an unceasing duel between these two dissimilar politicians.

If Grattan, the typical good man in adversity, is the hero, Fitzgibbon is the villain of the Irish piece. There are some politicians, as we know, who make up well in that rôle. Fitzgibbon was one of them. Descended from Catholic ancestry, he was a parvenu in Irish politics. He started life as a lawyer, and rose to notice by working assiduously at his profession and snatching at opportunities. In 1783 he became Attorney-General, and after the Regency dispute Pitt made him Chancellor. He had originally been a friend of Grattan, and supported him in 1782. But they slowly parted company on all questions of reform. Fitzgibbon's attitude towards

reform of every sort was very simple—he did not believe in it. He was the heart and soul of that fanatical spirit of Protestantism which was now beginning to make itself felt. He was a man of iron determination; arrogant, tactless, and cynical: incorruptible himself, he sanctioned and almost legalized corruption: with the unerring memory and implacable resentment of a great hater, he carried the animosities of politics far into the sanctuary of private life<sup>1</sup>. He was not a great speaker, nor a constructive mind, and he emphasized the narrowness of his views ‘by the public nuisance of gross, petulant and offensive manners<sup>2</sup>.’ But his oratory was exactly fitted to bring him notoriety or success in the Dublin atmosphere. Few Irishmen could sit silent under its sting. ‘The little penknife of the implacable pleader and his dirty quill,’ cried Grattan once in a metaphor which well expresses his whole-hearted repugnance, ‘mangling his country’s wounds, are best calculated to make her frantic.’ Phrases dropped casually by Fitzgibbon in debate were treasured up and set apart for lasting reprobation, in that most terrible of pillories, the memory of an injured people. In the things which concern her honour, Ireland is indeed

<sup>1</sup> Grattan did not. Even in 1797 he says in a private letter of Fitzgibbon, ‘But little Fitz has an excuse: he has a snap by nature, and is a vinegar merchant by profession, who throws his “aigre” flasks at the people.’—*Life*, iv. 324.

<sup>2</sup> *Grattan’s Speeches*, iii. 282.

‘easily roused’; but she is not so ‘easily appeased.’ Small wonder that when Lord Clare died, a disappointed man, two years after the Union had deprived him of a position in either country, his funeral led to one of the greatest orgies Ireland ever enjoyed. And what indeed could be said or done with a man who poked and goaded and exasperated his countrymen into disloyalty by constantly reiterating his vulgar assurance that, as reasonable beings, they could not possibly be loyal. To call one section of a nation ‘loyalists,’ and proscribe the other, is an old and threadbare device. But no one ever used it with less justification and more summary success than Fitzgibbon. ‘So long as human nature and the popish religion continue to be what I know they are,’ he told his countrymen in Parliament with his hand upon his heart, ‘my unalterable opinion is that a conscientious popish ecclesiastic will never become a well-attached subject to a Protestant state, and that the popish clergy must always have a commanding influence on every member of that communion.’ Men, as every one but a born pettifogger knows, are not ruled by reason alone: and the Irish Catholics were the last people in the world to enquire into the ‘logical’ political consequences of their religious position. But the result of the sickening repetition of these views by Fitzgibbon and his clique was to excite in the country the

very spirit which they professed to assail. Their influence in Parliament, especially when coupled with an open and unblushing advocacy of corruption, upon the weak susceptibilities of the Irish representatives, was of the most disastrous character. It resulted in a lowering of the whole tone of that assembly, and a gradual loss of its hold upon public opinion. A subtle influence of this kind is bad enough in any elective assembly, but the Irish Parliament was not, properly speaking, elective at all. General elections count for nothing in its history. If Parliament lost its character, the nation had no redress. And thus, whether he knew it or not, Fitzgibbon was already playing directly into Pitt's hands. Had it not been for him, a Union coupled with Catholic Emancipation could not possibly have been put forward as a bait.

The last ten years of the Irish Parliament, which since 1782 had met annually instead of biennially, are a period of ever-increasing bitterness. Grattan, who, after giving up Lord Charlemont's borough, had been elected one of the members for the city of Dublin, tried to set his face firmly against corruption. After a long and wearisome struggle the opposition succeeded in 1793 in carrying a 'Place Bill,' excluding all Government officials from seats in Parliament. Incredible as it may sound, no fewer than 109 out of 300 members, dividing between them one-eighth of the gross revenue of the

kingdom, were thus unseated<sup>1</sup>. A long-needed reform was also made about this time by the King's surrender of his hereditary revenue in return for a fixed civil list, not to exceed £225,000. At the same time, pensions of over £1,200 a year were forbidden to be allowed to any but members of the Royal Family. Grattan hoped that, by gradually fencing in the powers of the administration, he might enable Parliament, little by little, to acquire its real office of control. He wanted, as he put it, to assimilate the constitution of Ireland to that of England. The internal divisions of Ireland very soon showed him the futility of the attempt.

Events in France were now attracting the attention of the whole Western world. The principles of the French Revolution have met with very different receptions among the different nations of Europe. In some they worked rapidly, as a raging fever. Into others, who thought to shake them off entirely, they entered late and stealthily, but to work deeper and more far-reaching effects. In Ireland it was only natural that the Revolution should quickly make itself felt; but it was impossible, in so profoundly Catholic a country, that its influence should be lasting. It

<sup>1</sup> Minute details about the officials are given in *Grattan's Life*, iv. 141. The statement about their pay was made in Parliament by George Ponsonby. For the Union debates in 1800 there were, however, again seventy-two placemen in Parliament, v. *Grattan's Speeches*, iv. 5.



was only the folly of the dominant faction which, in trying to purge Ireland of the epidemic by violence, succeeded in arresting its course, and turning it into a chronic disease. For, even to this day, there is something incongruous in the idea of an Irish Jacobin. The cap of liberty sits unsteadily upon the Irishman's head. Danton's soul-felt enthusiasm for abstractions, or the cold persecuting proselytism of a Robespierre could never appeal to a nation for whom the humorous side of things is always within view. To talk Jacobinism is a very different thing from guillotining men against whom you have no personal grudge, who are neither landlords, nor tax-collectors, nor Englishmen. And with an Irishman, of all men, the warm personal motive is everything; the sober dictate of reason exists only for the pleasure of disobeying it.

But the deep-lying incongruity between French and Irish ideas was not immediately apparent. What struck Irish opinion most forcibly at first was not French opinions but French methods. The year 1792 witnessed a great burst of activity in the formation of political associations: the Catholic Convention, the Protestant Convention, the Whig Club, the United Irishmen, and the Friends of the Constitution. With the exception of the Whig Club, a moderate opposition body in Dublin to which Grattan himself belonged, every

one of these societies had several branches, though the United Irishmen were confined exclusively to Dublin and Belfast. The chief grievances urged were, of course, Parliamentary Reform and Catholic Emancipation; for the need for ministerial responsibility did not appeal to the popular mind. This general ferment of opinion led naturally to disorders in the more backward parts of the country. The leaven of Fitzgibbon had raised up a body of Protestant rioters, who called themselves Peep-o'-day boys, and went about offering insults to Catholics and doing damage to their buildings. The Catholic association of 'Defenders' was formed, as its name shows, to resist and repay these assaults. In deference to this agitation, a Roman Catholic Bill was carried through Parliament in 1793 by Sir Hercules Langrishe, who had been converted to this opinion by an eloquent letter from Burke. It finally put an end to all the restrictions of the Penal Code<sup>1</sup>. Catholics were to be on an equality with Protestants in every department of life; but they were not yet allowed to sit in Parliament. They could vote, but only for Protestants. But even this measure was ahead of the times, and many of its provisions, such as those allowing Catholics to rise in the legal profession, or sit on corporations, long re-

<sup>1</sup> It was not, strictly speaking, by one of the provisions of the Penal Code that Catholics were excluded from Parliament.

mained inoperative. Bills introduced in 1793 and 1794 by Grattan and Ponsonby on the subject of Parliamentary reform were not successful.

In spite of the widely expressed agitation, there was as yet no real discontent. This was partly due to the great increase in the prosperity of the country. There had been a succession of exceptional harvests, and trade, especially in linens, had been uniformly good. Irish exports rose from £3,700,000 in 1785, to £5,300,000 in 1792. It was not till the fatal misunderstanding about Lord Fitzwilliam that Irish feeling became really embittered against England. }

The details of this complicated business only concern us in so far as Grattan was personally concerned in them. They need not therefore be picked out from the tangle in which indignation and partisanship have left them. But whoever was to blame, Pitt, Fitzwilliam, Fitzgibbon, or Portland, the episode marks a turning-point in Irish history. It holds the seeds of the Rebellion of 1798 and of the mingled brutality and corruption of the settlement which followed it. It is the fatal knot in the tragedy which gathers up within itself all the threads of hatred and discontent which had been woven in the last six years; and it is out of their conjunction that the dénouement rapidly and inevitably proceeds.

The Portland Whigs, who had split off from

Fox in 1790, joined Pitt in July 1794, under the agreement that they should be given the Home Department, which included, in those days, the administration of Ireland. It was arranged that as soon as an opening was found for the Lord-Lieutenant, Westmoreland, he should be succeeded by Lord Fitzwilliam. Fitzwilliam was a man very similar in character, as he was in fortune, to the much-quoted Lord Durham. He was a man of strong opinions, which he was used to expressing strongly. He had long taken a great interest in the affairs of Ireland, and felt confident in his ability to play the part of beneficent despot. Filled with generous enthusiasm, he was tactless, headstrong, and irritable. He was a friend of Burke and Grattan, an enthusiastic advocate of reform, and a cordial hater of the doctrine of Protestant ascendancy. He acted as might have been expected from his character. As soon as he heard that he was designated for the Lord-Lieutenancy, he spread the good tidings abroad. He wrote to Grattan begging his help in the purification of government, and offering him a place in the Ministry. Grattan, accompanied by the Ponsonbys, immediately came to London for a consultation. He saw Portland, who assured him there was to be 'an entire change of system' in Ireland, and Pitt, who was cordial, but assured him of the contrary. Grattan, not unnaturally

perplexed, wisely declined a position in the Irish Ministry, but assumed that, if Fitzwilliam really were appointed, he would be able to have his own way. Portland, who was a thorough old woman<sup>1</sup>, was the most weak and inefficient of go-betweens; and Fitzwilliam was one of those men who do not see the necessity of undeceiving themselves. Pitt let him go to Ireland, but on the express understanding that Fitzgibbon and his men were to stay, and that there should be no change of system. He arrived in Dublin on January 4, 1795, and was welcomed with congratulatory addresses both from the Catholics and the Protestant dissenters. In his replies to these, Fitzwilliam announced his intention of 'promoting the union of Irishmen by calling men of wisdom and integrity to his councils.' He proceeded to act up to his words. On January 7, he dismissed Beresford, a Treasury official—and so in Pitt's own department—and one of Fitzgibbon's right-hand men. Other dismissals followed, till of the old Castle gang, Fitzgibbon alone remained. At the same time a violent Catholic agitation, undoubtedly fanned by the openly expressed intentions of the Lord-Lieutenant, spread throughout the country. At the

<sup>1</sup> 'Old dame Portland fills the place of Pitt' (*English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*). 'His grace,' adds the poet in a footnote, dated 1811, 'is now gathered to his grandmothers, where he sleeps as sound as ever.'



opening of Parliament, on January 22, Fitzwilliam committed himself to a large measure of educational organization; on February 3, Grattan followed the precedent of 1782 by getting £200,000 voted for the imperial navy; and on February 12, with Fitzwilliam's approval, he brought in a bill allowing Catholics to sit in Parliament. All this time the English Government was silent; but on February 8, they began to protest. First Portland, then Pitt, wrote long despatches urging the postponement of the Catholic question. Fitzwilliam wrote back, justifying himself on the ground that it was too late, and would now be dangerous to recede. On February 19 he was recalled.

The whole thing was a misunderstanding. Technically, Pitt was undoubtedly in the right, though it was difficult to acquit him of laziness or stupidity in not communicating earlier with Fitzwilliam. But morally, the case must be given to Fitzwilliam. No doubt he acted without tact. It was unwise to rouse a Catholic agitation the moment he landed. Quite apart from the question, which may be left open, whether the Catholics were yet sufficiently fitted to send co-religionists to Parliament, the grievance was not yet an acute one. They had obtained large concessions two years before, which they had not yet had time to enjoy. There was certainly no need to be in such haste to concede more. Grattan, of course, like all

Irish statesmen, took what he could get from an English Ministry ; but we have no reason to suppose that he himself would have selected that moment for the measure. But succeeding events proved only too conclusively that, on the main question, Fitzwilliam's Irish policy was the right and Pitt's the wrong one. Why indeed should it be necessary to prove that honesty is better policy than corruption, or toleration than bigotry ? Pitt objected to the wholesale dismissal of his confidential agents, and even Lord Rosebery speaks as if the substitution of Grattan for Fitzgibbon as the Lord-Lieutenant's chief adviser, were merely a party question of change of innings. This is to confine the view within the narrow walls of Parliament. There was all the difference in the world between the following of the two men in the country. Fitzgibbon represented a clique ; Grattan an almost united nation. He had the Catholics, the Dissenters, and the best of his fellow Episcopalians on his side. Against him he had a shamelessly avowed policy of corruption. Fitzwilliam's dismissals were universally welcomed throughout Ireland, although he had clearly had no time to look into details. Pitt professed to be shocked at 'unsubstantiated charges of malversation.' Perhaps he did not know the Irish reputation of his creatures.

Fitzgibbon, however, had an ally, who shared

both his invincible prejudices and his iron inflexibility. It was not Pitt who loved Protestant ascendancy. He had fought as hard as any man, though Ireland never knew it, for the Catholic Bill in 1793. He hated the rough and sinister accomplices he had perforce to use in his Irish work, and sent them away, with a sigh of relief, to their graves, or to the House of Lords, when he had done with them<sup>1</sup>. It was the King who was the 'sunken rock' which sent Fitzwilliam's Irish bark, with its message of good will, to the bottom. Fitzgibbon, or some malicious sprite at his elbow (the infamous Loughborough was not unnaturally suspected), reminded him of his coronation oath. For a quarter of a century more, men were to wait till this ridiculous but insuperable obstacle was removed, and Grattan was to survive it for exactly five months!

The news of Fitzwilliam's dismissal caused a revulsion of feeling against the English Government which has not yet to this day passed out of the Irish mind. Irishmen, it must be remembered, knew nothing of the agreement under which Fitzwilliam had entered Pitt's Ministry. They did not stop to reflect on the multitude of

<sup>1</sup> 'When Pitt first heard Lord Clare speak on Ireland in the House of Lords, he turned to Wilberforce, who was standing by him, and exclaimed: "Good God! Did you ever hear in all your life so great a rascal as that!"' Related by Wilberforce, v. *Grattan's Life*, iii. 403.

Pitt's embarrassments. Above all, they had never knocked their heads against the wilful obstruction of their Sovereign. They regarded Fitzwilliam's dismissal, as Pitt did Beresford's, as a 'solemn breach of trust'; never again would they confide in the honour of a British minister. Events showed that they had small reason to do so. It is sometimes claimed that Ireland was already in a dangerous state when Fitzwilliam arrived, and that therefore the effect of his recall has been exaggerated. This is false reasoning. The full significance of the question at stake in 1795 was grasped by Irishmen, with the vague but unerring instinct of a nation where its own safety and honour are concerned. That question was whether England would give a fair trial to Grattan's settlement, and whether it would come unscathed out of the ordeal. The scheme, it will be remembered, rested for its success on the indispensable condition of a sympathetic Lord-Lieutenant. With the possible exception of Northington, that *rara avis* had not yet been forthcoming. Grattan's alacrity in proposing another naval grant is an indication that he realized the importance of the issue to be decided. And Fitzwilliam with his impulsive and sympathetic character, so unfamiliar and out of place in an English council-chamber, was just the man to deal successfully with the peculiarities of the system. His recall was a death-blow to

Grattan's Constitution. Half a dozen parties, each with their patent nostrum, now sprung up amongst the men who two months before had united to acclaim Fitzwilliam as their saviour. With these constitutional quackeries the English Ministry could have nothing to do. Pitt, worried and distracted by a hundred cares at once, fell back on what seemed to him the only expedient left, a Legislative Union.

With the open failure of his Constitution, Grattan's political position was taken from him. The party which he had so painfully collected to welcome Fitzwilliam, dwindled away into discordant sections. By January, 1796, when Lord Camden opened Parliament, the Opposition vote had got as low as fourteen, and at about that figure it remained. But Grattan was not the man to desert a losing cause while the faintest ray of hope still remained. He saw that his country was drifting into irreparable calamity, and he could not sit by without attempting to stem the current. A tone of feverish impatience runs through all his speeches at this period. 'Quick, very quick; you have not a moment to lose,' was the perpetual burden of his strain. He kept hoping against hope that the eyes of the Ministry would be open to discern the signs of the times. No man ever fought more desperately single-handed against prejudice. There is the real earnestness of the seer in his adjura-



tions to the serried benches of the Mammon-worshippers opposite him. 'Let us make no more sacrifices of our liberties,' he cries, 'let us now sacrifice our prejudices—they will ascend in incense, the best use you can make of them—and be a tidings to your God that you are become a convert to your country.' And again, when Parliament declared by 143 votes to 19 that Catholic Emancipation was 'inconsistent with safety to the Crown and the connexion of Ireland with Great Britain,' Grattan turns on the majority, like a bayed stag, with the bitter cry: 'I know not where you are leading me—from one strong bill to another—until I see a gulf before me, at whose abyss I recoil.' In the years that he had laboured for the Catholics, he had learnt to know his countrymen. He knew that they were not revolutionists at heart. Why indeed should they be? There could only be one reason. 'If you force your fellow subjects from under the hospitable roof of the constitution, you will leave them, like the weary traveller, at length to repose under the dreadful tree of liberty. Give them therefore a safe dwelling—the good old fabric of the constitution, with its doors open to the community.' Grattan saw how, steadily and inevitably, Irishmen were being exasperated into rebellion. The small band of Protestants who were trying to captivate Ireland with the principles of the French

Revolution well knew the real importance of the unanimity of Parliament. Wolfe Tone had no credentials to show to the French Directory: they were supplied him in the nick of time by the speeches of Lord Clare. Here was the most influential man in Ireland declaring, with the appearance of inexpressible sorrow, that seven-eighths of his countrymen were traitors at heart. Armed with the French Alliance the conspiracy proceeded apace. It began amongst the Protestants of the North; the ten northern counties mustered 100,000 men in 1797; five Ulster counties were the first to be proclaimed under martial law. It was only later that the infection contaminated the Catholics, till the unspeakable horrors of civil war were let loose over the length and breadth of the land.

But some months before that time the voice of the prophet had been stilled. Sick of pouring his jeremiads into ears that would not hearken, and sinking under the double burden of failure and ill-health, Grattan determined to follow the example of Fox and secede from Parliament with his small band of followers. At the general election of August, 1797, he resigned his seat for Dublin, and went into retirement at Castleconnel near Limerick. From there he addressed to his fellow citizens a long letter in which he traces the history of the independent Parliament, and points out the steps

by which it had become involved in the present crisis. A few months later, when the rebellion became acute, this composition was complained of as having helped to inflame it. The 'loyalist' party, now daily swollen by the march of events, openly accused Grattan of sedition. In Dublin he became almost a by-word for treason. He was erased from the Privy Council, disfranchised from the Corporation, and his portrait was solemnly taken down from the walls of Trinity College. There is no doubt, as he himself afterwards confessed, that his indignation against Government had carried him too far. In the crisis of a civil war, moderate politicians are seldom listened to and never understood, and Grattan would have done better to have kept silence. But it must be admitted that he had much excuse—not only the intolerable rancour and malice of his ministerial assailants, but the incredible stupidity with which Government, by taking brutally violent measures before they were called for, heaped fuel upon the flames of the rebellion. War is always more horrible than respectable gentlemen realize. But Grattan may be pardoned his indignation at the tortures inflicted on men united to him by the closest bonds that a statesman can feel. The talk of flogging and torturing and hanging that was on everybody's lips was more than he could endure.

Not the least calamitous offspring of these days

was the breed of informers who sprang up ready to swear anything and arrest anybody at the Government's bidding. Grattan himself was very nearly made the victim of one of these creatures. A Government spy called at his house and tried to entrap him into treasonable talk: but, fortunately, Grattan was not to be drawn. Even thus, however, it was declared by his friends that his life would have been in grave danger in the spring of 1798 had he not been called to England to give evidence in a trial.

It is fortunately not necessary here to enter into the details of that awful year. Certainly no description could be adequate to describe the sufferings that fell upon the devoted Irish people, innocent and guilty alike. These never died out of the memory of Grattan—nor out of the memory of his countrymen. There is only space to quote one extract which will give some faint idea of the horrors of this worst and most lasting of civil wars. Sir Ralph Abercromby, on assuming the command of the troops in February, 1798, published a general order which throws a lurid light on the conduct of the campaign. 'The many complaints of irregularities in the conduct of the troops in this kingdom have too unfortunately proved the army to be in a state of licentiousness which must render it formidable to every one but the enemy.' No wonder Sir John Moore, the

hero of Corunna, said to Grattan, 'If I were an Irishman, I should be a rebel.'

After 1798, 1800—after Rebellion, Union. It would seem an inapposite moment even for the mention of the word. Yet it is easy to understand Pitt's feelings. He had never mastered the details of Irish government, he had never been in Ireland, and he was seriously alarmed at the narrow escape he had had in 1798. It was time, he thought, for England to settle the Irish Question once and for all. It was a bold decision. But if England was to carry it out, she must have the means. The first step most clearly must be a Legislative Union. The Irish Parliament had now become discredited on both sides of the water. Irishmen had no reason to love it, nor Englishmen to respect it. It ought not to be difficult, by a judicious use of Castle methods, to ensure its fall. People in England had no conception of the gravity of the step they were taking. They did not know that the associations of a Westminster clung round the Parliament House at Dublin. They thought it was only eighteen years old. The future Duke of Wellington put the English view bluntly and brutally, when he declared that 'there must be no more debating societies in Ireland.' He forgot that a Convention can be a more dangerous enemy than a Parliament; and a popular League than a regularly chosen Ministry.



Pitt decided to push the question at once. Lord Clare went over to see him at Hollwood in October, 1798, and persuaded him, somewhat reluctantly, that Emancipation was totally impracticable. But Cornwallis, the new Lord-Lieutenant, in an unauthorized manifesto, spread the general impression that the two measures stood or fell together. Another argument which was wielded with great effect was furnished by the analogy of Glasgow, whose rise was dated from the Scotch Union. It was urged that Cork would now attain to similar prosperity. As a matter of fact, the gainer was Belfast. Pitt's own arguments are set forth in his speech of January 31, 1800, 10,000 copies of which were circulated through Ireland. They may be summed up in two words—no alternative. The English Opposition, led by Sheridan (for Fox was still in retirement), rightly dealt less with the abstract constitutional question than with the policy of carrying the measure at that particular moment.

Not so Grattan. He had been spending the last eighteen months tending his health, and that of his wife, in the Isle of Wight. George Ponsonby had rallied the old Opposition without his help. United in the face of a common danger, and relieved from the embarrassments of the rebellion, they mustered in something like their old strength. In January, 1799, the first Union

Bill was defeated, after a long and exciting debate, ✓ by one vote, 106 to 105. Both sides foresaw a renewal of the struggle, and the means by which it would be conducted. The Opposition actually endeavoured to fight the Government with its own weapons, and raised a fund to out-buy doubtful members. It was a questionable and futile policy, but it showed the openness with which the administration did its work. On January 15, 1800, the Bill was again to be brought forward in the House of Commons. Grattan had returned to Tinnehinch at the end of the previous year, by no means restored to health, and desperate at the state of politics. At the urgent insistence of his friends, he consented to accept a seat which they had found for him. The election, which was for the close borough of Wicklow, could not be made before January 16. The Sheriff consented to hold it after midnight on the 15th. The moment the return was signed, a horseman sped with it to Dublin. He arrived at five in the morning, and Grattan, who was then very ill, was awakened by a loud knocking at the door. 'Why will they not let me die in peace?' he said. But his wife and sons insisted. His biographer describes the scene. 'I told him he must get up immediately. . . . Then I loaded his pistols, and saw them put into his pocket, for he apprehended he might be attacked by the Union

party and assassinated. We wrapped a blanket round him, and put him in a sedan chair, and when he left the door I stood there, uncertain whether I should ever see him again.' Meanwhile, Plunket and Ponsonby and a host of others had kept up the debate all through the small hours of the morning. At seven o'clock, Egan had just risen to speak, when Grattan entered the House. He was so weak that he had to be supported on either side. Dressed in the old Volunteer uniform, he slowly advanced to the table and took the oath. When Egan had finished, he rose, and obtained leave to speak sitting; then for two hours he kept the weary House together with a full and eloquent discussion of the whole question. 'Against such a proposition,' he concluded, and for once the expression was not out of place, 'were I expiring on the floor, I should beg to utter my last breath and record my dying testimony.' At ten o'clock the division was taken on an amendment, and the Ministry was found to be in a majority of forty-two.

Castlereagh followed this up by securing the supersession of the Irish Volunteers by English Militia. The question came up again on February 17. It was on this occasion that Foster made the speech which Lecky calls the best ever made against the Union. It was not, however, the speech of the evening. It was followed by

Corry, who made a violent personal attack upon Grattan, trumping up all the old informer charges against him. Like Flood, Corry had once been a familiar friend. He had not long to wait for his answer. 'Has the gentleman done,' cried Grattan, springing to his feet, 'has he completely done? He was unparliamentary from beginning to end. . . . I did not call him to order. Why? Because the limited talents of some men render it impossible for them to be severe without being unparliamentary.' And he proceeded, as he announced, to show him how to be both severe and parliamentary in a speech which, though totally unprepared, is a finer, because more dignified combination of self-defence and invective than even the celebrated reply to Flood. He knew that he was not rebutting these accusations for himself alone. In adversity he had learnt to identify himself with the people. At the end of his speech, with a sigh of relief, he turns away from his puny adversary, and submits himself, with a strange and unexpected humility, to the voice of the nation. 'To the people I bow: they may be my enemy—I never shall be theirs.'

This speech, and the duel which resulted from it, had a curious effect. It raised the prices in the Parliamentary market. But it also thoroughly re-established Grattan's political reputation, which

had undoubtedly suffered considerably during his absence. Cornwallis<sup>1</sup> reports that the encounter 'tends rather to raise Grattan, who was as low before as his enemies could wish.' He continued to rise steadily all through that desperate last session. The principle for which he contended, and which would have cut the ground away from beneath his adversaries' feet, was that on a question of such primary importance, involving nothing less than the continuance of their representative assembly, the nation ought specifically to be consulted by means of a fresh election. Cornwallis and Castlereagh were not going to be caught in that trap; but they were hard pressed to justify their refusal to follow the precedent of the Scotch Union. And so all through the session the singular struggle went on, the two parties bandying Locke and Vatel and Hooker and Puffendorff across the floor of the House, and citing every imaginable reason but the true one, namely, that a fresh general election involved a fresh Parliamentary auction.

The fight ended sooner in the country than it did in Parliament. Cornwallis, who went on a tour in Munster in the spring, returned satisfied with the general tranquillity. Ireland had suffered too much to protest against this last indignity. Half-deluded with fair promises, and helpless at

<sup>1</sup> Cornwallis' *Correspondence*, iii. 196.



the base desertion of many in whom she had trusted, she lay in that terrible stillness of resignation to which she was henceforward to grow accustomed<sup>1</sup>. It was the calm, not of acquiescence, but of exhaustion. Not even Lord Clare, who spiced his Union speeches with his sauciest invective, could rouse a show of agitation. Where even Clare failed to irritate, Grattan might well use his strongest language in Parliament without fear of being misunderstood outside. He did not mince his words. But Lecky is mistaken in calling his speeches seditious. It was not a question of open resistance. Castlereagh had seen to that. And Grattan firmly believed that the Union meant, at the earliest opportunity, a recurrence of civil war, and, finally and inevitably, a separation; the ravages of famine and emigration were beyond his gaze. The only chance for Ireland lay in an eventual recovery of her liberties. Standing amid the ruin of the hopes and labours of a lifetime, Grattan, with a courage which must have moved even the basest of his adversaries, sounded the first trumpet-call of Home Rule. 'I do not give up my country. I see her in a swoon, but she is not dead. Though in her tomb she lies helpless and motionless, still there is on

<sup>1</sup> The same mood recurred exactly half a century later. Compare Aubrey de Vere's description of the winter after the famine, 1849-50, in his poem 'The Year of Sorrow.'

her lips a spirit of life, and on her cheek a glow of beauty—

‘Thou art not conquered; beauty’s ensign yet  
Is crimson on thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
And death’s pale flag is not advanced there.’

The Bill was read for the third time on May 26, by a majority of forty-five. It passed quickly through the House of Lords and both the English Houses, and received the Royal Assent on August 1.

The Parliament House was sold to the Bank of Ireland, by which it is still occupied. The directors, prudently compromising between use and beauty, turned the House of Commons into accountants’ offices, and left the House of Lords to be a show place for English tourists.

On the general policy of the Union, and Pitt’s share in the transaction, this is not the place to speak. We may leave it to theorists to decide at what precise stage of irritation an Ireland with control of her own military forces became an imperial menace. Pitt<sup>1</sup> thought that the exacerbation had reached a dangerous point in 1795, and justified himself by the rebellion. Grattan held that even after 1795 rebellion might have been averted by

<sup>1</sup> Pitt, after denouncing the ‘childish measure’ of 1782, asks, in a tone of real alarm, what will happen when the two nations are no longer united by the ‘temporary cement’ of hostility to French Jacobinism, Jan. 31, 1799, *Parl. Hist.* xxxiv. 254.

conciliation, and that even after 1798 the Union might have been replaced by Emancipation. Pitt was the greater constitutionalist, but Grattan was the better Irishman. On the first point Grattan was unquestionably right. If ever a war was avoidable, it was the rebellion of 1798. The Irish are such incompetent rebels that, even after it had been planned, a little careful management could have averted most of its horrors. The second point must be left open for lack of evidence. Only one thing is quite clear. Pitt could not have chosen a worse moment, worse methods, or worse ministers for his scheme.

The defect of Pitt's statesmanship was its 'tidiness.' He wanted to wipe Ireland off his slate, so as to leave his mind free for other measures. The imperial menace was not pressing. Ireland was too exhausted, too dispirited, to dream of helping France. He thought he had broken her spirit, when he had done no more than wound her self-respect. Nations cannot be disposed of in a couple of sessions. Had he waited a few years, given the project of a Union time to become popular, urged real instead of fictitious arguments in its favour, and, above all, coupled it with Catholic Emancipation, Parliamentary Reform, and a commutation of tithes, he might possibly have succeeded in carrying it through with the approval of Ireland. If these things were impossible under a constitution

which put the most prudent politician in England at the mercy of the most obstinate, this was only an additional reason for delay.

For the methods by which the Union of 1800 was carried were sufficient to doom the most perfect of schemes. Some writers defend Pitt's corruption on the principle that 'one big sin is better than a lot of little ones.' They forget how big the one sin was, and how unnecessary the little ones. In one year, between the first and second discussions of the Union, according to the detailed list drawn up by Sir Jonah Barrington, 63 members were induced to vacate their seats, and 25 members were openly bribed to change sides. Of the 118 members who supported it in 1800, only 7 had received nothing in the shape of a consideration. It was then, not only an unreasoning but unforgetting national instinct which opposed the Union, but, as Lecky says, 'the whole unbribed intellect of Ireland.'

Lastly, Pitt chose the wrong ministers. Of course, they are damned by their works—the immortal trio, Cornwallis, Clare and Castlereagh. The insipid Cornwallis, trying to do dirty work with clean fingers, plays an insignificant part in the story. It was Castlereagh who did the work; and it is Castlereagh who is remembered for it, with his truculent stammer, his malign perseverance, and his ill-omened promises. That he was

an instrument ill-chosen for a task which needed, above all things, tact, conciliation, and truthfulness is shown by the reputation which lives after him, not only in Ireland but in England. 'He died for his country,' remarked Byron, at the news of his suicide. And Byron was, before all things, a gentleman.



## V.

Grattan did not let himself be snuffed out by the Union. The last twenty years of his life, which form the epilogue of his story, are, in a sense, the most attractive in his whole career. With nothing to gain by his activity, and every reason to think himself entitled to self-indulgence, he kept up his courage, held fast to his enthusiasms, and continued to spend himself unwearingly in the cause of his country. It was, although he did not know it, something in the nature of an expiation for past mistakes. There is a great but unconscious change in his tone between 1782 and this last period. He could no longer have misinterpreted his countrymen. He becomes, not more Catholic, but less Protestant; not a Jacobin, but more thoroughly democratic. He identifies himself more fully and more consciously with the underlying sympathies of the great mass of his countrymen. It is this which makes his speeches in the Imperial Parliament so much more pleasing than his earlier oratory. There is less rhetoric, less conscious art, less crackle of metaphor and epigram: but there is more of unselfish enthusiasm, a deeper strain of feeling, a broader and more generous faith.

When the Union became law, Grattan retired to

Tinnehinch, and devoted himself for some years to study and the education of his sons. His health was gradually restored by the simple regimen of a country life, and although he was never afterwards able to mention the Union without emotion, his spirits slowly recovered from the shock of political failure. He was thoroughly happy in the midst of his family, his books, and his native hills. Not the worst of the evils entailed by the Union was the 'vagabond life,' as he called it, which it imposed upon the Irish member—six months of the year, or more, spent amid the turmoil and oppressive stolidity of Westminster. He was never so happy as when, a weary homeward-bound legislator, after the long and fruitless English session, he could see, at last, in the distance before him rise,

'Long-sought, the Wicklow hills.'

But as yet neither his duties nor his wife's health took him out of Ireland. At Tinnehinch he employed himself in reading over again his favourite authors, Shakspeare, Milton, Pope, and all the best of the ancients, and in the study of history, for which he had a great passion. 'The great study,' he said once, 'is history, and the most essential study, the history of your own times.' He took a great interest in the studies of his sons. He would not have them educated in an English public school, and, as there was a very limited choice in Ireland, preferred to keep them at home.

Some of his letters of advice to them in their reading are interesting, as showing his preferences. 'Keep up the knowledge of the classics for ever,' he writes in a letter which, written in expectation of a duel, bears something of the character of a last farewell, 'but above all things attend to history, and ever make your own remarks as you read it.' Another time he advises them to read aloud every day some portion of Homer, Milton, and Demosthenes, and, again, to get by heart much of Homer, Virgil, and Horace. Moderns will not agree with his verdict on Junius (with whom he was by many identified) as a 'better Burke,' though he thought Burke's speeches would endure for their imagination rather than their argument, 'as long as the language lasts.' To his own speeches he could seldom be induced to recur, though he always regarded his earlier efforts, particularly those before 1782, as his best.

At Tinnehinch, too, he loved to entertain any distinguished guests who found their way to Dublin. The famous prima donna Catalani was a welcome visitor, and Edmund Kean was once surprised rehearsing his *Macbeth* in the park. Like Burke, Grattan fell easily into the country life. One incident is too characteristic to be omitted.

During the disturbances connected with the movement of Emmett in 1803, Grattan raised a corps of yeomanry on his Queen's County estate,

and admitted Roman Catholics into its ranks. There was at first some trouble with a neighbouring corps of Orangemen, and Grattan's men were nicknamed 'The Virgin Mary Corps.' But tact and good sense prevailed, and when, a little later, the two corps were actually amalgamated, 'the orange lilies and party tunes were abandoned, the Protestants marched from parade to church and the Catholics to chapel,' and the mighty problem which Parliament feared to handle was solved by the good temper of a country gentleman.

Meanwhile, in England, Pitt had resigned the Premiership in February, 1801, because the King would not hear of Catholic Emancipation, and in March was anxious, for imperial reasons, to come in again and say nothing about it. The ill effects of transacting local and imperial business in the same legislature were already apparent. For three years, however, the nation endured Addington. Pitt's 'Hundred Days,' as his last weak tenure of power has been called, began in May, 1804. A year later, at the insistence of Fox and Fitzwilliam, Grattan allowed himself to be elected for Malton in Yorkshire. His first speech at Westminster was on the subject on which he was now to spend all his remaining powers, Catholic Emancipation. As so often, he was fortunate in his adversary. Dr. Dui-genan, who spoke just before him, was the very type of the vulgar fanaticism which Grattan was

trying to expose. The younger Grattan, who knew him well and inherited some of his father's sting, says of him that 'he never seemed to think of his God but as a scourge to his fellow creatures.' He was a specialist in obsolete papal bulls, and his speeches, says Curran, were 'like the unrolling of a mummy, nothing but old bones and rotten rags.' As for his delivery, 'it resembled that of a mobman in the last stage of agony.' It was to answer this precious recruit to the Protestant contingent that Grattan first rose at Westminster. Men had heard great things of his Irish reputation, but they remembered the failure of Flood, who was 'an oak of the forest too old to be transplanted.' Grattan soon dispelled all such illusions. After analyzing Duigenan's speech into four parts, an invective against the Catholic religion, an invective against the present generation, an invective against past generations, and an invective against future generations, he remarked, 'It is to defend these different generations and their religion that I rise—to rescue the Catholics from his attack, and the Protestants from his defence.' At this point Pitt himself led the universal applause of his followers. Grattan's oratorical success at Westminster was henceforward assured.

Grattan, however, never led an Irish party in the English House. The nominal leader was George Ponsonby. But, as a matter of fact, there



was no real Irish party before the Catholic Emancipation of 1829, and the Reform Bill which soon succeeded it. /It was true that the Union had largely done away with corruption. / Its sole advantage was, as Grattan put it, that it proved the feasibility of reform. / Before 1800 the private representation was double the public; after 1800 the public representation was double the private. But there could as yet be no agitation for repeal. Both sides naturally waited to see the working of the Union. Grattan's whole object was now, by liberal legislation on subjects like emancipation, parliamentary reform, tithes, and education, to make Ireland 'permanently, unfeignedly loyal' to the connexion, so that the Union might ultimately (though not, as he well knew, in *his* lifetime) be repealed for the mutual satisfaction of both countries. / He had learnt the immorality, as well as the stupidity, of trying to frighten Englishmen into Catholic Emancipation or any other reform. Whenever European affairs afforded English prejudices any legitimate reason for dreading the effects of Emancipation, which happened several times during the progress of the French War, Grattan always desisted from his demand. Nor was he ever afraid of disagreeing with the Catholic Board, which conducted the campaign in Ireland. On one occasion, in 1815, he temporarily terminated his connexion with them, and

they put their petition into other hands. He had learnt to estimate the degree and the manner in which an Irish agitation represented Irish national demands. It was not his fault if Englishmen taught Ireland the meaning of the dilemma: 'If Ireland is quiet, nothing *need* be done: if not, nothing *ought* to be done,' and forced from her politicians the retort, 'but something *shall* be done, if it be only coercion.'

As for the Irish Protestant party, they soon merged themselves with men who gladly accepted their prejudices and gave some of them a share in their emoluments. Grattan refused office in the Fox administration of 1806: but Castlereagh took his place with Camden and the versatile old Portland in the 'No-Popery administration' of 1807.

Grattan was restored to the Privy Council in 1806, and at the close of the same year he was elected member for his old constituency of Dublin. He interested himself in all Irish questions, but based all his hopes upon Emancipation. Overtures were at this time repeatedly made to the Catholic Bishops to support a scheme by which Government would secure a veto on their election, in return for a State payment to the Catholic priesthood, analogous to that already made to some of the Dissenters. The scheme had been approved by the bishops before the Union, contrary to the advice of Burke; but Grattan now

strongly opposed it. He regarded it, and probably in the right light, as an attempt to stifle the Catholic agitation by bringing the bishops under Castle influence. It is noteworthy that it was the Catholic laity that gave the death-blow to this scheme. The priesthood had indeed more reason to thank Government than the laity. The one permanent benefit conferred by Fitzwilliam's administration was the establishment of a college for Catholic priests at Maynooth, supported by a Government grant. This scheme, which owed its inception<sup>1</sup> to Grattan, was imperatively necessary, if the country was to have a truly Irish hierarchy. During the whole of the eighteenth century priests went abroad to places like Louvain or Douay or St. Omer for their education. But now, when there was the infection of Jacobinism or its more contagious rival, Ultramontanism, in the air, this system had become impracticable. Even the No-Popery administration recognized this, and though, with despicable parsimony, they reduced, they did not dare to abolish, the grant. But Englishmen did not realize that by educating the priesthood and leaving the laity in ignorance, they were making an intellectual gulf between the two which would enormously complicate the religious situation of the country. Grattan's pleas for the establishment of a system of parish schools which

<sup>1</sup> *Life*, v. 562.

should unite the inhabitants of the island in one language and one ideal, were habitually disregarded. He advocated the mixed education of Catholics and Protestants, and a teaching of Christianity which should emphasize 'the four great duties of man—duty to God, duty to one another, duty to the country, duty to the government.' He also frequently protested against the financial chaos which resulted in Ireland from the Union. In spite of the steady rise of population, her debt steadily increased until she was finally declared bankrupt in 1816.

But it was on Emancipation that he spoke most frequently. No less than sixteen of the speeches that remain from this period are on this question. He brought it forward session after session, and never grew weary of enforcing his arguments upon an assembly that admired, yawned, forgot, and voted against him. Once, the year before his death, he was within an ace of success. He was defeated by two votes only. This last and most hopeful of his Catholic speeches contains the best statement of his position. The question he never ceased asking Englishmen was simply 'Why not emancipate?' In favour of the scheme they had the successful abolition of the Penal Code, the example of Europe, the commands of the Christian religion. Against it, nothing but outworn prejudice and a King who, by disqualifying his subjects

for their religion, 'put himself in the place of his Maker and attempted to jostle the Almighty from His throne.' It was not a question of allegiance. 'Do you think our allegiance would be made more perfect if we thought the King a great doctor of divinity, or, like Henry VIII, a tyrant who could change our religion without understanding it?' When they clamour for this allegiance to Caesar without a rival, 'they would strike the constitution out of the state and God out of our religion.' Grattan never confounds religion either with morality or the Church establishment. Bitter experience had taught him to make the distinction. And now, with an earnestness which tells of faithful and courageous thinking, he expounds the part which, in his view, such religion, unfettered alike by moral codes and state endowments, could and ought always to play in high political affairs. 'Gentlemen call this a question of empire; the Gospel is not a question of empire; it is the highest possible command pronounced by infinite power; it is the highest imaginable interest pronounced by infinite wisdom; as the empire swerves from it, she falters; as she stands by it, she prospers.' And thus with eloquence which, in its collected form, still fills over one hundred pages of close print, he tried with every art that reason, eloquence, and even flattery could employ, to exorcise the evil spirit of an age-long prejudice from an obsti-



nate assembly of Englishmen. But he never used a threat. With a patience rare in opposition statesmen, and in an Irishman, at such a period, little short of miraculous, he wished to win by persuasion or not at all. And, of course, he failed. Honourable gentlemen declared the oratory excellent, if somewhat indiscreet in touching upon subjects ordinarily avoided. But then, were not oratory and indiscretion to be expected from an Irishman?<sup>1</sup> As for the arguments, those who followed them thought them plausible, but they went dead against common sense. Grattan had to learn, as all popular statesmen learn sooner or later, that it is small use slaying the hydra where victory goes by the counting of heads. Many a fabulous monster, admirably slaughtered in the arena of debate, comes unexpectedly to life again in the division lobby. Men of feeling could not fail to be alive to the pathos of the situation. Sir James Macintosh gives us a sad glimpse in a passage of his memoirs. 'Came home at three this morning from our defeat on the Catholic Question,' he writes on May 10, 1817, 'Poor Grattan's last exhibition of his setting genius, and of that gentle goodness which will glow till the last spark of life be extinguished.'

<sup>1</sup> When Foster, a decorous man of affairs, made an animated speech on the approaching bankruptcy of Ireland in 1810, 'the English members said he was tipsy,' *Grattan's Life*, v. 422.

The unequal struggle could not go on for ever. It was wonderful that Grattan's courage should have kept up his health so long. But at last, in the autumn of 1819, it began to fail him. He had been hurt in an election riot at Dublin the year before, and barely escaped the loss of an eye. 'Like Actaeon,' he said with gentle pathos, 'I am devoured by my own hounds.' But he never recovered from the shock. At the election after the King's death in January, 1820, he was unable to go to the hustings, but was elected unopposed. As the spring advanced, he grew feverishly anxious to go to London to take his seat, and speak for the last time on emancipation and reform. The 'sunken rock' was at last removed: there were only two votes to convert; he thought victory must now be assured if he were only there to claim it. On April 21 he had a consultation with four physicians. They all agreed that he could not go to London. Grattan would have none of it. 'Doctors, you are right,' he said, with all his old spirit, 'I will however go. We are both right, you in ordering me to stay, and I in deciding to go.' But for some weeks he was so weak that it was useless to think of moving. At last, on May 12, he got as far as Dublin, and there, for the last time, met a Catholic deputation. He received them with all the dignity which he always loved to preserve in political affairs. 'I shall go to England

for your question,' runs his written reply, 'and should the attempt prove less fortunate to my health, I shall be more than repaid by the reflection that I made my last effort for the liberty of my country.' On May 20 he left Dublin. Crowds came down to the quays to see him off. At Liverpool the people tried to take the horses out of the traces and draw him to the hotel. He could now no longer bear the motion of a carriage. They hired an open boat, fitted it up with matting and canvas, and so by slow stages he proceeded southward along the canals, spending the nights in the villages. Blood-poisoning had now set in. It was a race against time. At Stony Stratford he insisted on finishing the journey by carriage, and at the ordinary pace. On the thirty-first he arrived in London. Here all his old friends came to see him. Though he was now in a dying state, he was with difficulty dissuaded from going to Parliament. On June 4 he was very much weaker. When he knew the end was near 'he ordered me,' says his son, 'to get the paper I had written for him on the Catholic Question, and said "Add to it these words, I die with a love of liberty in my heart and this declaration in favour of my country in my hands."' He then said, "It will do, I should wish it to be read in the House!"' These were his last words, and an hour later his gentle spirit passed away. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, where he lies by the side of his old fellow labourer, Fox.

## VI.

It is a relief to turn away from this chronicle of broken hopes and futile heroism to a general consideration of Grattan's character and career. This is perhaps, in his case, a simpler task than usual.

Grattan was not a great statesman, and he was not a complex character; he was not what the world calls a great man. At bottom he took no pleasure in those things which the world never forgives a man for despising. Fame, wealth, rank, power, were never anything to him but means for promoting the happiness of his countrymen. Most men forget their ideals in their ambition to attain them. But there was in Grattan's character a strain of disinterestedness, the presence of which can be felt through the whole of his career. He loved his neighbour as himself. He loved his country better than himself. And he never, to the end of his days, understood why others did not do the same. There was a fascinating simplicity about him which seems to have impressed all his contemporaries<sup>1</sup>. It was especially noticeable in the last twenty years of his life, when disappointment might well have tinged him with

<sup>1</sup> v. speeches in House of Commons, June 14, 1820.

cynicism. At the time of the rebellion, when many of his friends fell from him, he was bitterly unhappy. 'Is it possible that Charles Sheridan could have written the strange attack on me?' he writes to a friend. 'Alas! I speak from what I hear, for I never read these attacks—that would be endless labour. *I find that I know men but little.*' Yet few politicians have ever suffered so cruelly from their friends, and certainly none have deserved it so little. Flood and Charlemont, his two familiars of 1782, both deliberately put an end to the friendship. Corry, a constant guest at Tinnehinch, spread infamous libels on his patriotism. Many of his political friends and followers deserted him for a bribe. The people of Dublin, who should have known him, three or four times turned against him.

But as old friends fell from him, adversity itself brought him a new one. He learnt to make a friend of the people of Ireland. His character underwent a deep and silent transformation between 1782 and 1800. In 1782 he was, like his father and colleagues, a Protestant Anglo-Irishman. He held enlightened views, but it was the illumination of the *ancien régime*. He consorted with men who had as little sympathy with the mass of the people as Pericles or Walpole. The political ideal of Flood and Charlemont was indeed precisely similar in principle to that of the



Periclean circle at Athens—government *for* the Catholics *by* the Protestants. Grattan's settlement broke down, as we have tried to show, because, governing *for* the people, he misinterpreted their wishes. As he grew older, he no longer interpreted: he learnt to feel for himself. In one of his letters he sends a message to an old gardener, with whom he was in the habit of talking politics. 'Tell Matthew that if he were Minister, he would never have gotten himself into such an embarrassment.' It was true. Bad laws make a bad people: Irish history is a commentary upon that text. But Grattan lived to learn the opposite truth, that no amount of legislation can form a nation, unless the stuff is already there: and that no man can ever successfully divert national character from its own self-appointed ideal. It was not merely the failure of his settlement that taught him not to speak of the political independence of Ireland. So long as the population went on growing, that ideal remained as practicable as ever. But it was his growing acquaintance with the real Irish character which showed him that it had all been a dream—a confused, impossible dream—from the beginning.

But he never went far enough to realize in thought the reason of his great failure. The defects of his scheme were, it must be remembered, twofold—moral and intellectual. He did not understand Irishmen, and he did not understand constitutions.

The moral mistake he lived down. But his intellect, never of the highest order, had early been trained rather to speak than to think, and the taint of this education was with him through all his life. Thus never to the end of his days did he see the incompatibility of Irishmen, as he learnt to know them, with the constitution which he had devised for them. Even in his last illness he declared 'the business of '82 was perfect, the treaty was complete. It might have been done some other way, but the way I adopted was sufficient.' This shows how completely he had quieted an uneasy conscience. The failure was, he thought, merely due to the ill fortune which dogs Irish history; in other words, to accident. There have been accidents in history—but this was not one of them.

Deeply as he felt with the mass of his countrymen, Grattan was, however, always an anti-Jacobin. He learnt to be an Irishman, but he never learnt to be a democrat. He never lived himself into nineteenth-century ideas. The new radicalism, planted by Fox, and watered by Bentham, could not possibly appeal to him. Like Burke, he hated the French revolution, 'as the gates of hell.' He saw in it nothing but class-oppression, and militarism, and lust for power. It was the one subject on which he and his Westminster audience understood one another. The speech which he delivered during the Hundred Days was more vociferously

applauded than any made there since Pitt's on the Peace of Amiens.

As a Parliamentary, Grattan was unrivalled. It was natural that he should be. He was born and bred in a parliamentary atmosphere. He was in Parliament during the whole of his active career. His triumph was the triumph of a Parliament, and his failure the fall of one. He lived in Parliament, and, practically speaking, he died in Parliament. His last depositions are drawn up in parliamentary fashion as resolutions, and faithfully expressed in the old parliamentary forms of speech. It was the limitations of a parliamentary outlook which ruined his greatest achievement: it was to effect a reform in parliamentary representation that he spent his dying breath. He was a master of the barren science of procedure, and was never tired of carrying the House into a long and complicated discussion of precedents. The difference between proceeding by bill and proceeding by address, on the question of the Regency, he regarded as of the utmost national importance. And he has such reward as posterity can give for such service; his name is indissolubly connected with a vanished Parliament.

It is all the more striking that he had few or none of the parliamentary vices. He was not greedy for office. 'Office,' says Lord Rosebery<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup> *Pitt*, 285.

'is an acquired taste.' But most statesmen in Opposition find no difficulty in acquiring it. Grattan sat in Opposition practically all his life; yet he refused office no less than three times, in 1782, in 1795, and in 1806.

Above all, in an age when integrity was still the exception, no one ever breathed a suspicion of double-dealing against Grattan. Indeed, his friends used to wish that he were as good a patron as he was a friend. To be a protégé of Grattan was generally regarded as rather a disqualification for the obtainment of an official post. Statesmen of a century ago are sometimes lightly pardoned for offences, the very suspicion of which in modern politics is held to be odious and unmentionable. It is unfair, we are told, to expect a statesman to be better than his contemporaries; he would not be a successful statesman if he were. Before presuming to pass moral judgments, we must adapt our critical standards to the measure of the age. Whenever this excuse is brought forward, whether it be for the vicarious iniquities of Pitt, or the uncompromising cynicism of Fitzgibbon, or for the hundred others whose actions are writ large in the dirty records of Irish intrigue, the example of Grattan should surely invalidate it. He, at least, could breathe that poisoned air without partaking of its corruption. His statesmanship was often defective, but it was always scrupulous

and high-minded. And thus, in spite of all his failings, his name is still cherished and venerated by his countrymen, and Ireland feels the richer for the memory of his unalterable devotion.

It is more difficult to speak with assurance of his oratory. Literary verdicts are proverbially contradictory, especially at but a century's distance. But on a question of past oratory, hardly any two critics will agree. Written speeches on extinct political issues are like great blocks of shapeless débris left standing by themselves on a sunny mountain side, the memorial of some great convulsion that has long since passed away. Their grandiose phrases make a depressingly irrelevant appeal to the placid and impartial latter-day reader. The great speeches of the world have left their mark by powers of reasoning, of imagination, or of persuasion. Grattan was neither a great thinker, nor a great dramatist. He could not sway men's minds, like Burke, with the exposition of reasoned and inexpugnable truth, nor melt their hearts, like Lincoln, or the best of the ancients, with the impassioned handling of the most universal of human themes. It may be that he possessed what has often been considered the one and only requirement of the true orator, that wonderful magnetic power called persuasion, which lulls men's minds to sleep and casts upon them what spell it will. If this be all, the orator,



like the actor, has his vogue ; but posterity, which has not heard, cannot presume to criticize. The charm will not work its magic from the printed page. It is probable that, though he sat in opposition all his life, Grattan possessed a large measure of this power. But the majority of his audience, both at Dublin and at Westminster, were always, intellectually speaking, Englishmen. They knew that they would be persuaded, and did not fight against the spell. But, unlike the Athenians of old, they discounted the effect of the oratory beforehand, and passed straight from the presence of the enchanter to the division lobby of his opponent.

But there is more in Grattan's speeches than persuasion. They have an abundant measure of the quality on which more than one 'classic' bases his claim to immortality. They are cleverly composed and interesting to read. Grattan had the mind of a rhetorician, and made an epigram as easily as most men make a sentence. Rhetoric is not oratory—but neither is it inconsistent with oratory. True rhetoric, like much of Grattan's, enriches the language. He said of Napoleon, for instance, and the phrase has stuck, that 'there was some method in his madness, and more madness in his method,' that 'he was a great actor in the tragedy of his own government,' that 'he made God Almighty a tolerated alien in His own

creation'; and of Fox, 'you are to measure the magnitude of his mind by parallels of latitude.' And this, which deserves to live in the first person, 'Your empire cannot be saved by a calculation'.<sup>1</sup> This fluency of epigram was the patrimony Grattan brought with him into politics, and it remained with him to the end. But in his early attempts, he deals with words like counters; they look pretty, but ring hollow. During the whole of his career he was painfully teaching himself to mean what he said—in other words, to think. Here, for instance, is a gem from his first extant speech, which well illustrates the effect of a rhetorical education. 'Look at one another,' he cried to his countrymen, 'and ask, where is that inundation of merit or of business that can arm the tongue of past administrations with the shadow of an argument for such unparalleled mischief?'<sup>2</sup>

But if eloquence be more than glorified acting, if oratory be more than rhetorical writing, if the matter of the piece be inextricably interfused with the manner of the speaker, even then it is difficult to deny that Grattan had some elements of the real orator. In the first place his speeches breathe from the outset, and in ever increasing measure, an intangible and deep-lying sincerity. Actors have their part to play, and epigrams, too, are often

<sup>1</sup> All from *Speeches*, iv. 375-84.

<sup>2</sup> *Speeches*, i. 5.

spiced with a flavour of insincerity. But Grattan, when most an actor, and most a rhetorician, was then of all times most in earnest. His contemporaries speak of his moving of the fateful address in 1782 as if it were a theatrical performance, at which the speaker must rise to the occasion and be 'in good form.' To Grattan it was the crowning moment in a solemn national celebration. Like Ruskin, he had to suffer for his style. It was his life, not his words, which taught men to take him seriously.

But sincerity, despite Carlyle, is not the pearl of great price. Grattan's speeches are for the most part nothing more than well-meant and well-written discussions on past political events. But every now and then there comes a breath of that inscrutable spirit whose working is mystery and whose name is art. Grattan had just a touch of philosophic imagination, just a passing inspiration of dramatic power. And it is for this and for this alone that his speeches are still worth reading as literature. It is in his last years, when he had a cause with which all the silent depths of his character were in sympathy, that it comes to him most frequently. In the destiny of the people of Ireland lay any hopes that he cherished of his reputation with posterity. He was too modest to set them very high. 'I know the strength of the cause I support; it might appeal to all the corners

of the globe; and it will walk the earth and flourish when dull declamation shall be silent, and the pert sophistry that opposed it shall be forgotten in the grave.'

It is perhaps in his first speech at Westminster, on as sad an occasion as can well fall to any statesman's lot, that, speaking under the stress of the deepest emotion, he reaches the highest pitch of his eloquence. The sorrow which he could not repress burst out in a heartfelt metaphor at which few sat unmoved. 'The Parliament of Ireland—of that assembly I have a parental recollection. I sate by her cradle, I followed her hearse.' But the old fighter did not linger over the time-honoured recital of the woes of Ireland. It was the year of Austerlitz and Trafalgar, when men were drawing together in the face of a common danger. Passing with a sudden phrase into the first person, he closes with a peroration which has still some of the lilt and movement of a battle-cry. 'Half Europe is in battalion against us, and we are damning one another on account of mysteries, when we should form against the enemy, and march.'

It is here, where the real Grattan is speaking for the real Ireland, and in accents which reach other than contemporary ears, that we find him shadowing forth the only true answer to the problem which perplexed his career. Wherever the folly of her rulers or the impatience of her

sons may have carried Ireland since his death, his fame was spread abroad among a people not yet forgetful of the high lesson which he spent his last years in expounding—that Great Britain and Ireland were not set alone together in the Western ocean to bicker on without respite till the crack of doom, but that an Irishman is then most an Irishman, when he brings his own unique contribution of service and ideals to the cause of imperial unity and beneficence.

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